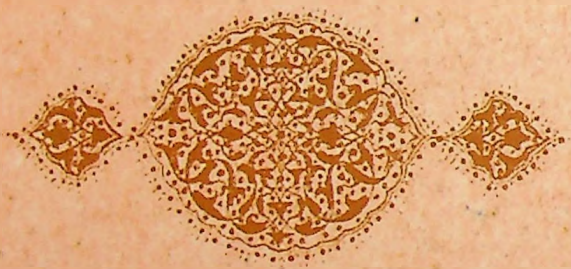
The Selective Articles of the Second International Conference of

Mahdism Doctrine



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Introduction

و قل جاء الحق و زهق الباطل ان الباطل كان زهوقا
.And say: Truth has (now) arrived, and falsehood perished: for falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish

نجعلهم ائمه و نجعلهم و نريد ان نمن علي الذين استضعفوا في الارض و الوارثين
And we desired to bestow a favour upon those who were deemed weak in the land ,and to make them the Imams,and to make them the heirs.
اختلاف قال رسول الله (ص): ابشروا بالمهدي -قال ثلاثا- يخرج علي حين من الناس و زلزال شديد يملا الارض قسطا و عدلا كما ملئت ظلما و قلوب عباده عباده و يسعهم عدله جورا، يملا.
The holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "I give you good tidings about Mahdi; he will be inspired in my community and make the world full of justice as it has become full of oppression; people will be satisfied with him, and will divide all properties equally among the whole people".

قال رسول الله (ص): المهدي يخرج في آخر الزمان.

The holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "Al- Mahdi raises at the End Of Time".

The Reason:
With the collapse of Communism as with the failure of Liberalism and the disclosure of America's plots to plunder and massacre the nations from one side, and the expansion of communication means and trends toward the Global Village as well as Globalization from the other side, and to quench the thirst of today's parched

and weary generation, a new plan should be proposed which can compete with the hypotheses of the great world theoreticians concerning the End of History and man's final destination, and as a result, manage to fascinate the hearts of whole peoples, including the common and the erudite ones.

We have to seek for a comprehensive theological, universal, trans-religious, inter-religious, noble, deep, ideal, and reviving precept which can cherish hope in our hearts and our age, end the whole religious and non-religious clashes, solve man's problems, fulfill his desires, specify and reform the movement of nations, present role models in whole facets of man's life, and at last, achieve the nation's full potential to stand against the injustice and oppression of any kind.

The only teaching, which enjoys these features and potentiality, is 'Mahdiism', and among the common terms, prevalent in the world literature, 'Doctrine' sounds the most appropriate. Among the religious teachings, 'Mahdiism' is the sole teaching, which includes all these features. It is not a choice but the only one, and not a way, but the only one:

يا «بيل الله الذي من سلك غيره هلك) ، (السلام عليك يا باب السلام عليك) (منه) ، (لا ابتغي بك بدلا و لا اتخذ من دونك وليا الله الذي لا يؤتي الا

Although the whole religious teachings are to cherish hope in man's heart and help him achieve his ultimate goals, they differ in their significance and roles. Like the verses of the holy Quran, which are all counted as miracle, some differ from others in eloquence and significance, as the verse (تبت يدا) (is not in the same level of (قيل يا ارض ابلعي).

The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is the elixir of life, which transforms the copper nature of men - despite their diversity of opinions - into gold, and as a result, reforms humankind and the world.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is Moses' rod against the magicians, which has charmed all hearts and minds at the Time End.
Thus, it is worth presenting our unique, priceless stuff and life elixir to the globe with the global literature of the Age, the moments of which are as equal as years and ages, and discussing the nature, principles, and efficiency of 'Mahdiism Doctrine', perchance the gaps be bridged .
The nature :
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' signifies a theological and global teaching, which offers an efficient commentary on fundamental aspects of human life and causes fundamental reforms in their views, acts, and stimuli, accordingly.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to behold the issue of Mahdiism as a comprehensive teaching as well as a strategic and efficient theme.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to discharge the world from the whole ties, dullness, and corruptions as well as to deliver the nations from the oppressors' captivity.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to cherish high hopes to the future world and the future of the world, viz the philosophy of life and man's history.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to cast threat in the oppressors' hearts and to maintain the oppressed peoples' unity and power.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to seek for the savior of all affiliated, and offended peoples in all ages and from

all races.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is the sole way to attain the ideal society with the competent members and the reformist leader.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to seek for the Reappearance of the heavenly Savior so as to terminate the whole pains and straits of mankind.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to deliver the earth and heavens from the mischief of evil and Sofyani forces.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to reach maturity and to feel exigency for the Divine Savior and infallible Reformist.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to end man's concerns in all aspects of his personal and social life.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is the last resort in the End of Time and the sole standpoint on the End of the world.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is man's rebirth; the advent of a new chapter of man's golden book of life and the
10 end of a page of his history.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to owe the earth and all its possessions to mankind of any color and race.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to recognize the rights for all peoples; justice, security, wealth, knowledge, honor, wisdom, etc.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to unite and uniform the entire world and its inhabitants.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to broaden the horizons of the contemporary man.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is the last resort of the contemporary man against the whole evils and corruptions.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to put an end to the whole

clashes and to respond to whole doubts.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to present a teaching with unique potentiality for the contemporary man in the age of Globalization and the deadlock of all isms and schools of thought.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to plan for the global government of the pious men, ruled by the monotheistic Reformist.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to negate the egoism and to blur the whole geographical borders in order to form one single allied world.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to fill the earth with justice and equality as it has been filled with oppression and tyranny.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is the start of Divine pure life in the end of history.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to disgust oppression and to demand for the Savior, the peoples' common wish.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is the revival of Islam and the way out of the deadlocks and passivity.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is man's only lifeboat against the raging waves and frightening whirlpool of Time End.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is the world will to pull the clouds aside in order to observe the world-illuminating sun in the sky.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to open the pearly gates to the bright future and man's Utopia.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is to follow the way of Divine prophets, guardians, and saints so as to attain the ultimate goal and soul elevation.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is God's certain vow in the

End of History.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is Shia's supra-nuclear weapon for conquering the world.
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is the way of Islam development in the world and the window to convert the whole peoples to Islam,
(يدخلون في دين الله افواجا) [Then, you will see that people enter God's Religion in crowds] while they are uttering (الله محمد رسول الله لا اله الا) [There is no god save Allah, and Mohammed is His Messenger].
The 'Doctrine of Mahdiism' is the brilliant shaft of light and an opening to the Morning (اليس الصبح بقريب) [Is not the Morning near?].

Bright Future Institution

Mahdism Doctrine

Phiroz A. Poonawalla

In the vast field of Imamology, as a cornerstone of Shiite theology, Mahdism embodies the central axis of this theology, covering the most important doctrines of Islam. With Mahdism as the center of its system, Shiism assumes a future-oriented history. Based on divine intervention, Mahdi's indwelling nature in history, or at least the part of history known as 'Great Occultation', creatively addresses the issue of theodicy from the perspective of divine suffering, for it is suffering in the exile of occultation mixed with hope in close proximity to a process history that defines and re-defines an eschatological community of people in the spirit of renewal and resurrection. Historically, this process has manifested itself in various shapes and forms.14

There are two aspects of Mahdi's existence- Historical Mahdi and Theological Mahdi. For us, the domain of "theological Mahdi," i.e., the Messianic,is more important and sadly it is precisely this domain that is seriously neglected, disjointed by from critical theological reflections and often woefully mis associated with the historical Mahdist or (post) Mahdist social movements, thus misconstruing the theological autonomy of Mahdist thought with its supposed political manifestations or ramifications.15

The content of Mahdist "promise" unfolds in man's journey with God, in the anticipatory hope of the coming reality of the "expected Savior," in whom is sustained the faith in the end of human suffering and the celebration and fulfillment of justice. The Mahdist promise presents itself as the epiphany of the eternal present in the world, which can be understood only as part and parcel of a transcendent subjectivity that asserts the self-concealment of Mahdi as a divine matter of "self-revelation." In other words, God can be known through Mahdi's absence and the awareness of his indwelling on

earth, an awareness which builds the altars of his belief system in the heart of the believer, the individual. 16

Thus the entwinement of Mahdism and Creation, for it is God's creative work that extends the Savior from the realm of reality to the realm of eternity. Therefore, the premise of occultation and the promise of reappearance give the Shiite theological form the definitive character – History as eschatology, giving history a progressive nature.

Consequently, strictly speaking Mahdism puts Shiism in a perpetual state of motion, giving it a built-in mechanism for self-overhaul, by virtue of the fact that in the Imam's absence no one can close the gate of ijtihad. The writer rightly observes:

"The occultation and divine hope in the end of history are two sides of the same eschatological event. They point back to the promises of final reappearance of the savior that can only be understood as the continuation of God's self-manifestation and self-involving nature in the relation with the world, especially with humanity. In making Mahdi hidden from the people, God limits their knowledge of him, entrusting them with the moral commitment to faithfulness in the promise of salvation. In the eschatological sense, Mahdism is actually about the transcendent self-revelation of God. Revelation as occultation-promised-to-turn to reappearance is actually about the fulfillment of God's promise, wherein history finds its goal in Mahdi's lordship over all, the eschatological consummation".17

Teachings of Mahdism

The teaching of Mahdism reflect his great desire to purify Islam and return to the conditionthat existed during the time of Prophet Mohammad(S.A.W).

A fact which no-one can deny is the reality of other religions making development and progress by looking forward while it is for Islam also to look forward but within the tenets of Islamic shariah. However the best approach for the Muslims is to look back at the period of Prophet Muhammad which is

undoubtedly the Golden age of Islam. At this point of time, Mahdi has three basic tasks.

1. Tearing down all philosophical systems that deny Allah's Existence and support atheism.
2. Fighting superstition by freeing Islam from the yoke of those hypocritical individuals who have corrupted it, and then revealing and implementing true Islamic morality based on the rules of the Qur'an.
3. Strengthening the entire Islamic world, both politically and socially, and then bringing about peace, security and well-being in addition to solving societal problems.

According to many hadiths, Prophet 'Isa (as) will return to Earth at the same time, and will call upon all Christians and Jews, in particular, to abandon their current superstitions and to live by the Qur'an. As the Christians harken to him, the Islamic and Christian worlds will come together in one faith, and the world will experience that period of great peace, security, happiness, and well-being known as the Golden Age.

As for the day of Resurection

"As for the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qiyamah), one must distinguish here between the individual experience of eschatological realities and the eschatological events concerning the whole of humanity. Usually the Day of Resurrection or Yawm al-qiyamah refers in fact not to the death of the individual but to the final end of present humanity not the eschatological experience which every individual must understand at the moment of his or her death, but that of the world of the present humanity itself. The Islamic teachings reserve the term al-qiyamah for cosmic eschatological event crowned by the resurrection of creation at well as the resurrection of the individual. More specifically these sources distinguish between the greater resurrection, al-Qiyamat al kubra which is that of the cosmos followed by the resurrection of the whole of humanity and the individual death and resurrection al-Qiyamat al-sughra which the soul undergoes

following upon the event of death. What takes place between the death of the individual and the resurrection of the whole of humanity has been debated by various schools of Islamic thought.

The Qur'an also refers to eschatological events which concern the whole of humanity. As already mentioned Islam believes that this world in which we live is not eternal. It has a beginning and an end after which Allah will create other worlds. For He is always the Creator, al-khaliq. But this present world was created with a definite beginning and will have a definite end marked by eschatological events. According to traditional sources, these events involve, first of all, the appearance of a figure whose name is Muhammad al-Mahdi. This appearance is anticipated on the basis of the hadith of the Prophet who said that where oppression and iniquity cover the earth "a member of my tribe shall appear whose name will be the same as mine." Therefore, throughout the centuries, Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'ite, have believed that a figure will appear one day who will be the Mahdi, the Guided One, who will destroy iniquity, reestablish the rule of Islam and bring back justice and peace to the world.

Islam sees the function of the Mahdi and Christ as being associated with each other and their coming as part of the same major eschatological events. The coming of Mahdi will coincide with the coming of Christ and there will be termination of the present history of mankind and of time as we ordinarily experience it.

This Divine Personality, the last nomine of the last Prophet of Islam (A.s.), will spread the teachings of Islam in the four corners of the world. He will change the strife-torn, miserable, unjust & tyrannical world into a garden of peace, justice and tranquility virtue and righteousness.

He will gather all the disintegrated true beleivers on the platform of purity and righteous persons, their due status & honour in the society, whilst the enemies, the unjust and evil persons will be degrated and dishonoured. The whole

creation-the earth, the sky, the moon and the stars, is in the domain of Hazrat Mahdi (A.S.). The universe is in motion at his instance. The time can be changed by him and not he by the time and environment.

After the revelation of these facts one can understand easily the secret of Imam's longevity and youthful exuberance. All the creatures have to go beyond the frontiers of life to the great unknown first by jumping in the vanguard of youth and then to the tail end of the life called old age by evolutions but the Imam (A.S.) is undisputedly invariable with this evolution and would remain young.

He will then draw strength and support from the Islamic Union and cause religious moral values to prevail across the world. In fulfilling this sacred duty, by the leave of God, he will possess great power, strength and dominion. When the blessed person of the Mahdi appears, by God's leave, the Mahdi's great deeds will be the greatest proof and evidence that this holy individual has actually emerged. It is reported in one hadith that "people will pledge allegiance to the Mahdi, albeit against his wishes.

After the Mahdi comes to head the Islamic world, it will be of no importance whether people refer to him as the Mahdi or not. Neither will a person saying that he does not believe him to be the Mahdi change anything. That is because the predestined event will in any case occur. He, like all the other prophets, will fulfill the duty set out in his destiny and will cause the religion to prevail on earth as the Mahdi of God. The Mahdi will not say, "Accept me," but his destiny will take that form.

The Mahdi is the manifestation of our Lord's titles of the Compassionate and Merciful, and at the same time of those of the Subduer and the Irresistable. Nobody can stand in the way of the Mahdi and the dominion he will have over the world. Atheists, deniers and materialists will resort to various means to stand in the Mahdi's way, but God, as the Subduer and the Irresistable, will cause religious moral values to prevail on earth. By the will of God, however, that dominion will come

about through love and dialogue, and God's spiritual obligation.

The entire Islamic world is in any case the army of the Mahdi. However, this army is an army of love, not of bloodshed. Opposition to bloodshed, cruelty, violence and terror is the main attribute of the Mahdi. The Mahdi will cause religious moral values to prevail by means of knowledge, information and culture. As revealed in the hadiths and in the works of great Islamic scholars, the Mahdi will inflict a total intellectual defeat on atheist ideologies, will teach people the essence of the religion and religious moral values, and will wage a major intellectual struggle to turn people to faith and proper values. Our Lord will make the Mahdi and the great intellectual struggle he wages a means whereby the troubles of the end times are eliminated. This feature of the Mahdi is revealed in another hadith:

"The most auspicious of the community of Muhammad ***AND YOUR PROTECTOR WHO WILL DO AWAY WITH YOUR TROUBLES ... IS THE MAHDI!"*** 18

In another hadith it is reported that corruption will come to an end by means of the Mahdi, to be replaced on earth by peace and security:

God WILL PUT AN END TO BLIND CORRUPTION BY MEANS OF HIM (the Mahdi). Everywhere will be made safe... 19

According to the information in the hadiths, people suffering from troubles and poverty will seek refuge in the justice, compassion, love and generosity of the Mahdi. In one hadith it is stated that:

The community will SEEK REFUGE IN THE MAHDI as honey bees cluster around their sovereign. *He will fill the world, that was once full of cruelty, with justice, and people will return to the golden age of Islam ...*20

When the Mahdi causes Islamic moral values to prevail on earth, poverty, hunger, suffering and troubles will come to an end and bloodshed will stop, and people will attain the true happiness, peace and security for which they have longed for so long. This climate of love, peace and plenty, which the

Mahdi will be instrumental in bringing about, is described thus in the hadiths.

"Once the earth is full of cruelty and enmity, one of my line will emerge. He will fill the Earth with equity and justice, just as it was previously filled with oppression and tyranny."21

"Heaven will send down rain upon them in torrents, the earth will not withhold any of its plats, and wealth will be available to all."22

"The younger ones wish they were grown-ups, while the adults wish they were younger... The good become even more good, and even the wicked ones are treated well."23

As can clearly be seen from the information in the hadiths, the Mahdi will treat people with love and compassion, provide solutions to disagreements by peaceful means, and patiently call people to faith and proper moral values. The Mahdi's struggle against atheistic ideologies will be an intellectual one, in which he will be victorious, by the blessing of God, using very rational and wise methods. According to the hadiths, this great struggle of the Mahdi's will be waged in great calm, tranquility and order:

In this time, neither a man will be awoken from sleep, nor will a person's nose bleed.24

The Mahdi will follow the way of the Prophet. He will not wake up a sleeping person or shed blood. No Sunnah will fail to be brought to life, and no bid'at (innovation not sanctioned by the Qur'an) will fail to be eliminated ...25

As stated in the hadiths, Islamic moral values will prevail over all the world by means of the Mahdi. He will provide just solutions to tensions and disagreements that will be acceptable to all sides, and all problems will be resolved peacefully. The Mahdi will call people to the compassion, patience, goodness and beauty commanded by Islamic moral values and, in this as in all other matters, will represent a role model for people with his superior values and attitudes. This call of the Mahdi's to people is reported thus in the hadiths:

After performing the evening prayer, he (the Mahdi) will speak in the loudest voice: "O people! I remind you of God. I tell you what your place will be in the presence of God tomorrow, on the day of judgement. God has sent you much

evidence and the prophets, He has revealed to you the Qur'an and commanded you to ascribe no partners to God but to maintain your obedience to God and His prophet. Reanimate what is given life by the Qur'an, forbid what is forbidden and assist and support the Mahdi. Because the world is about to experience ill and to come to an end. I call on you to labour with His book, to eliminate superstition and to reanimate the Sunnah'."26

Again according to the hadiths, there will be no more enmity or hatred in the time of the Mahdi, and violence and terror will come to an end. Some of the hadiths on this subject read as follows:

Enmity and hatred between people will cease. Scorpions and snakes will not be poisonous, and even children will play with snakes without being bitten... Wolves will be among sheep like sheepdogs. THE WORLD WILL FILL WITH RELIGIOUS UNITY LIKE THE CUP FILLS WITH WATER. Nobody but God will be worshipped. NOTHING WILL BE LEFT OF WARFARE AND CONFLICT 27

20 *Then the Earth will become safe so that LIONS MAY GRAZE WITH CAMELS; TIGERS WITH COWS, WOLVES WITH SHEEP; and so that children may play with snakes without being harmed.28*

As can be seen in the hadiths, in the time of the Mahdi there will be great brotherhood among peoples who are now in conflict, and peace, friendship and love will replace all forms of enmity. The moderate, contemporary, rational and civilised Islamic model that will form during the time of the Mahdi will illuminate the whole world.

All this information clearly reveals that the road to be taken by the Mahdi will lead to great cultural progress all over the world and turn people in the direction of Islamic moral values.

The Mahdi is actually here now, but is concealed. The reason for that concealment is to protect himself from political and other forms of attack by atheists, materialists and deniers.

Our first duty is to recognize the Imam, who is the Imam of our Age. This is such an essential task that the prophet has

said in many traditions: ***"He who dies without recognizing the Imam of his age is like one who had died during the jahiliyyah*** 29

Does recognizing the Imam, mean solely that we believe in his existence and then sit idly awaiting his reappearance? No one with any sense of logic and faith in Allah and the last day would agree to this.

To die during the *jahiliyyah* means a death devoid of Islam and faith. And it is obvious that one who dies without recognizing the Imam of his age is counted a disbeliever.

What is required of us is what the Imams have narrated: Imam Ali said: for our Qaem there is a long absence and it is as if I see the shia, roaming around like sheep during his occultation, searching for their pasture, but not finding it.
(This means that the Shia during the ghaibat is likened to sheep without a shepherd to lead them to the greener pastures, so too the shia will be without an Imam to lead them to guidance) 30

The Imam continues, for whoever remains steadfast from them in their religion, his heart will not become hardened because of the extent of his absence, therefore he will be with me in the hereafter.

Books of popular Shi'ite theology contain the most minute descriptions of the coming of the *Mahdi* (The Guided One), as the Hidden Imam is often called. Only God knows the time of his appearing, but some of the Shi?ites seem to know everything else about it! His coming will he preceded by wars, confusion, eclipses of sun and moon, a terrible increase of infidelity and corruption of morals. Men will cease saying the prayers, and will lie, take interest and bribes, build for themselves strong houses, and take counsel with women. Women will enter business, will sing in public, and will ride astride. Muslims will become the most abject of peoples. *Dajjal* will appear riding on an ass, and will entice many people after

him and destroy them. Then will appear the Mahdi. At once his 313 faithful followers, who like him have been hidden for more than a thousand years, will hasten from the ends of the earth to his side. All true believers will join him with drawn swords, and win for him the sovereignty of which he has been wrongfully deprived these many centuries. His armies will sweep over the whole earth, killing all who refuse to submit to their Lord. All former prophets and Imams will return to earth to aid the Mahdi. He will bring to an end all oppression, and will fill the earth with justice. Only Shi'ites will then be found on the earth, and at last the religion and government of all mankind will become one. Following a long reign of these true believers, all will die, and then will come the Resurrection and the Last Judgment.

For many people of education these predictions would be interpreted allegorically, or might be rejected as nonsense. Hut most Sh'ites in Iran a century ago took all these details very literally. The swords which till recent times were hanging in numerous shops and homes in readiness for the coming of " The Lord of the Age" proved how real these hopes were to many people, and how central a place in their expectations was occupied by the dream of the conquest of unbelievers and the establishment of a universal Shi'ite theocracy in all lands.

The Shi'ite doctrine of the Imamate is closely related to their beliefs about the Prophets. They hold that among and above the 124,000 sinless prophets whom God sent to guide men, there were certain Great Prophets, generally thought to be Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, who in succession were God's representatives on earth. Each one of these was the Prophet for the whole world for a long period of time, bringing a book of laws from God for all mankind, and foretelling the Prophet who was to follow. Though Muhammad was the last of the Prophets, he was followed by the Imams, who were equal to him in rank, and differed only in that they did not bring new laws to replace those of the Koran. There is a popular belief that the first thing created by God was the "Light of Muhammad," which abode in Adam and the Great

Prophets who followed him, and which was seen in its perfection in Muhammad and in the Imams who are one with him.

There will come a day in which no cruelty, no injustice, no hostility, no killing, no oppression, no lies, and no corruption will exist in the world. it means that after a period of corruption and ignorance finally the world will be filled with equity and justice. And the reason for not collapsing or destroying the world in future is the expectance of The Mahdi (as) in coming and making man to live a happy life. A period in which only peace, humanity and morality will govern the world.

The Prophet of Islam (SAW) calls that day, the day of light and human dignity.He said :

" Hazrat Al Mahdi (as) will come in a situation that diversity and degradation among the people is so high that the world will be ruined. He will come and preserve humanity from damage and corruption. Then God will enrich peoples hearts with faith and love"31

So Al Mahdi (as) is not a thought of mere sitting and waiting, not a future telling, but he is a true reality, a special personality who himself expects his appearance. He lives among the people, watches us and we watch for him, he is with our sufferings and desires, and he shares our happiness and our oppressions. His divine life is planned this way, not to make himself appear and wait with other people for the promised time.

Therefore, expectation for the factual savior of the world does not mean to sit silent. Especially in the case of obligations of the religion, i.e, "Jehad" – Holy War in order to set God's laws we cannot deprive ourselves from the responsibilities , anyway the Muslim's job is to distinguish the right path from the wrong, especially in calling the people to:

"Enjoining the good deeds and prohibiting the evil".

Just as the Sun hidden behind the clouds provides us with light and warmth.....,

Imam Mahdi provides us with guidance even though he is in Ghaybat, (hiding).....

In other words, ever since he has inhabited the earth, human has had the wish to lead a social life filled with happiness in its true sense and has striven toward this end. If such a wish were not to have an objective existence it would never have been imprinted upon human's inner nature, in the same way that if there were no food there would have been no meaning for hunger (since hunger is understood when one compares a person who has eaten food and a person who has not), and if there were no water there would have been no thirst and if there were no reproduction there would have been no sexual attraction between the sexes.

Therefore, by the reason of inner necessity and determination, the future will see a day when human society will be replete with justice, when all will live in peace and tranquillity, and when human beings will be fully possessed of virtue and perfection. The establishment of such a condition will occur through human hands but with Divine Assistance. And the leader of such a society is called in the language of the traditions, al-Mahdi (the Mahdi; the guided one).

In this connection a scholar opiones about the sociologists theory of Mahdi.

"The world's foremost intellectuals are of the opinion that the wars massacres, murders, prostitution and all the evils of this age which are daily in the news are because there is no equilibrium between man's material and spiritual requirements. The man of today has turned his back on moral values and spiritual riches, although he hs conquered the seas, the deserts and space nd has taken himself to the moon. It is obvious that by relying in force and power he has not established order and justice in the world and that only with technology and the material sciences the happiness of the humanity will not be served. Man has no other resort than to strengthen his social relations on the basis of faith and virtue and to save himself from the vortex of dangers with the guidance of a great world reformer who establish a rule based on justice together with peace, security and sovereignty in the state of affairs, human society is moving quickly towards preparation from the rising up of the age".32

In history there has not been a more talked about subject than Mahdism and the coming of a saviour who will clean the earth of evil and salvation that will have engulfed it. Every religion, every school of thought in its own way has predicted and prophesized this event.

In the different religions that govern the world (either divine or not) such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam there are references to a person who will come as the savior of mankind. These religions have given glad tidings of his coming, although there are naturally minor differences in detail that can be discerned when these teachings are compared carefully.

However one thing that all these teachings have in common is that "A human will come to establish peace and tranquillity all over the earth". Every religion has a different attachment to it, however. The least thing that a human being (regardless of his religion) is supposed to do, is to accept what ALL these teachings have in common. This goes to prove the necessity of belief for "his coming". Thus, the saviors of all these religions who are all expected to come at the end of the time, are manifested in one individual, since the foundation of such belief is established by all. The attachments of different religions can be reconciled on their own tendencies, and thus rejected. The fact remains that the teachings of the previous religions have been under a long alteration process, and only Islam has been guaranteed its survival. Thus we should accept the attachment that the traditions of the Prophet (PBUH&HF) has offered us with regard to the one who is coming whose name is Imam al-Mahdi (and, of course, there will come Jesus as one of the Imam al-Mahdi's follower, based on the prophetic traditions).

The duty of the Imam is not only the explanation of the religious sciences and external guidance of the people. In the same way that he has the duty of guiding men outwardly, the Imam also bears the function of "Walayah" and the internal guidance of human. The divinely appointed Imam directs human's spiritual life and orients the inner aspect of human action toward God. Clearly, his physical presence or absence has no effect in this matter. Imam is the representative of Allah

(Khalifatullah) on the earth, and is His vice-regent. He is the connection between the heavens and the earth, and is appointed by Allah as the intermediate for the rest of creatures. His existence is always necessary even if the time has not as yet arrived for his outward appearance and the universal reconstruction that he is to bring about.

A divinely appointed Imam is a human, but being human does not mean that he could not have any authority over other human by the permission of Allah. The closer the human is to Allah, the more authority he will have. Closeness to Allah is obtained through obedience and piety. When one reaches that level of perfection, he does not desire anything except Allah's orders. Imam is not divine, but he is fully supported by divine power. He has been given authority as the Quranic verses below testifies. This authority has come from Allah and is also controlled by Allah.

It is not appropriate to confine the deliverer of the world, the Mahdi, to one particular nation. He will actually come to fight against all discriminatory claims of racial, creedal and national distinction. Consequently, he should be regarded as the Mahdi of the whole of humanity. He is the savior and deliverer of the people who worship God. His victory is the victory of all the prophets and all the righteous ones on earth. He will be restoring the religion of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all of the heavenly revelations, namely, Islam; he will revive the pure religion of Moses and Jesus which had foretold the prophethood of Muhammad.

On the basis of rational and textual evidence one can surmise that as long as human beings live on the earth, there must exist a perfect and divinely protected person among them who could personify all the perfect qualities that the human being can possibly attain. Moreover, such an individual must be responsible, both theoretically and practically, to guide humanity. This person is the Imam, the leader of humankind. Having himself ascended on this sacred path of human perfection he takes it upon himself to call others onto those stages and stations. Hence, he becomes the mediator between the hidden world of the spirit and the human world. The bounties of the hidden world descend upon him first, and

through him reach other human beings. It is obvious that the non-existence of such a person among people would inevitably lead to the absence of any goal for humankind. Such an absence would necessarily lead to the perdition of human society. In the final analysis, regardless of any other proof, this rational and textual evidence confirms that there is no period in history, including our own age, without an Imam. Since there is no manifest Imam at this time, we can say that the Imam is in occultation and lives a concealed life.

It is important to keep in mind that the Prophet and the Imams had time and again informed the people regarding the major function of the awaited Mahdi, namely, the destruction of the tyrannical powers and the rectification of injustices. Because of this, two kinds of people were bound to pay particular attention to the presence of the Imam:

First, those who are wronged and persecuted and, unfortunately, whose number has always been large. This group will rall around the Imam and put enormous pressure on him to redress the wrongs committed against them and defend their rights. In other words, there will be endless turmoil and chaos resulting from the rising and revolutions.

Second, those who will be in power and a source of corruption and ill treatment of the people. These tyrants will not be afraid to employ any unjust means to remain in power and protect their interests. In fact, they will be willing to sacrifice their entire population as long as they retained power. Since they will see the presence of the Imam as a threat and an obstacle to their own interests, they will be bound to remove him at any cost so that they could continue to rule. In fact, at times the rulers will unite in their elimination of the major threat to their power, namely, the awaited Mahdi. Hence, they will be determined to annihilate the source of justice and equity among the people.

If the Imam is absent the human species will be extinct. If there is no Imam then God cannot be known or worshipped perfectly. Without the Imam the link between the material and the spiritual become severed. The heart of the Imam is like the source of electricity that distributes light to numerous lamps. The illumination and energization of the hidden universe first

mirrors on the heart of the Imam and then from there it reflects on the hearts of humankind. The Imam is the heart of the created universe and the leader and guide of humankind. It is evident that his presence and absence have an impact upon these actualities.

the existence of the twelfth Imam and the benefit derived from him are compared to the benefit derived from the sun hidden behind the clouds. To elaborate on this imagery let us remind ourselves of the way natural science explains the phenomenon. It is established in natural science and in astronomy that the sun is the center of our solar system. The laws of gravity protect the earth from falling into an abyss, and permit the earth to revolve around the sun, generating the distinction between day and night and different seasons according to its position in relation to the sun. The thermal energy produced by the sun is the source of life on earth and its light illuminates the otherwise dark earth. This benefit accrues to the earth regardless of the fact of whether the sun is shining directly or from behind the clouds. In other words, all its functions (illumination, providing energy, growth, etc.) are intact even when it shines from behind the clouds. In fact, whether it is from behind the dark clouds or at night when we think the sun is not present, we are still recipients of the sun's thermal energy and all other benefits that are critical for our survival on earth. The existence of the Imam is like the sun behind the clouds that benefits the dwellers of the earth. He is the heart of humankind and its existential guide. In order for his benefits to reach humanity it does not matter whether he is manifest or in concealment.

By doing so we have actually fulfilled our obligation as a follower of the Imam. In return, we have attained the highest reward of having furthered the realization of an ideal society, even if merely by a step. Any rational person can attest to this benefit of striving to further the divine purposes for human society. It is for this reason that there are numerous traditions that speak about the merits of awaiting deliverance through the appearance of the twelfth Imam, and which regard this awaiting as a form of serving God.

Faith in the Hidden Imam and awaiting deliverance through his return is a source of hope and peace for the hearts of the believers. Such a hope is one of the major causes of the success and advancement of the Islamic ideal. Any group of people that becomes bogged down by pessimism and despair also suffers from self-imposed negativism that leads to the defeat of the purpose.

There is no doubt that the social and political turmoil in many parts of the world, the decline of moral and ethical vision, the deprivation and poverty suffered by the downtrodden, the spread of tools of various forms of imperialistic intervention in the affairs of the weaker societies, the arms race among the powerful countries --all these -- have led sensitive and conscientious thinkers around the globe to become concerned and even, to a certain extent, pessimistic about the ability of human society to deliver itself from its self-cultivated gradual destruction.

The only door that has remained open for humanity is the door of hope in the darkness of despair. That hope lies in the divine intervention in human affairs by the sending of a divinely guided leader, the Mahdi, to establish a godly society founded upon the divinely ordained laws. Indeed, it is this hope that gives solace to the disturbed hearts of those who have suffered injustices. It is the hope of seeing that government based on the acknowledgement of the Unity of God which has safeguarded the faith of the people, and has made them firm in their commitments to God. It is faith in the ultimate victory of truth that has made these people seek an active role in working towards social reforms and other related matters. Seeking the help of God under these circumstances helps human beings to avoid becoming hopeless in the face of continued atrocities and wrongs committed against the innocent. The Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) laid the foundation of this positive attitude by introducing the universal program of reform under the divinely guided leadership that will undertake to unite human resources in creating the ethical order proclaimed in the Qur'an.

To conclude, faith in the promised Mahdi has made it possible for the Shi'a community to hope and work for the

ideal. It has eliminated the negative spirit of pessimism, engendering in it the positive spirit of confidence in the human ability to work for its betterment. The belief has, furthermore, required the followers of the twelfth Imam to fight against the forces of disbelief, materialism, corruption, and injustice, and to work for the government of God, the perfection of the human intellect and the establishment of true peace through justice on earth, and to further human knowledge and technology. It is for this reason that the hope for deliverance during the occultation has been regarded as the best form of divine worship and martyrdom in the path of truth in the numerous traditions reported from the *ahl al-bayt*.

The Twelfth Imam Endeavors to Defend Islam during the Occultation

One of the orations of the *Nahj al-balagha* points to the fact that the Imam of the Age during the occultation also is engaged in furthering the cause of Islam and solving the problems faced by the Muslims as much as he can. Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib said:

"They (i.e., Muslims) took to the right and the left piercing through to the ways of evil and leaving the paths of guidance. Do not make haste for a matter which is to happen and is awaited, and do not wish for delay in what the morrow is to bring for you. For, how many people make haste for a matter, but when they get it they begin to wish they had not got it. How near is today to the dawning of tomorrow. O people, this is the time for the occurrence of every promised event and the approach of things which you do not know. Whoever from us (i.e., *ahl al-bayt*) will exist during these days will move through them with a burning lamp and will tread on the footsteps of the virtuous, in order to unfasten knots, to free slates, to divide the united and unite the divided. He will be in concealment (*sitra*) from people. The stalker will not find his footprints even though he pursues with his eye. Then a group of people will be sharpened like the sharpening of swords by the blacksmith. Their sight will be brightened by the revelation (*tanzil*, i.e., the Qur'an), the interpretation will be put in their ears and they will be given drinks of wisdom, morning and evening".

The apparent sense of this oration suggests that during the time of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, people were awaiting events about which the Prophet had informed them. In all probability, it was information related to the occultation. The presumable sense of the oration suggests the Imam during the period of concealment would live an extremely veiled life. But he will endeavor to solve the problems facing the community with deep insight and will vindicate the sanctity of Islam. He will remove the difficulties and will come to the aid of the wronged ones. He will disperse the group that would have come together to destroy the Islamic foundations. He will eliminate all the organizations that he would identify as being detrimental to the purposes of God. He will provide the necessary preliminaries needed for bringing about a beneficial society. With the blessed presence of the Imam of the Age a group of people will be trained to defend the religion, and will be inspired by the Qur'anic sciences in their resolutions about the ideal Muslim society.

The *Mahdi* is Islam's main messianic figure. *Al-Mahdi*, "the rightly guided one",is widely believed to be the name of an "eschatological figure whose presence will usher in an era of justice and true belief prior to the end of time."

Ours is an ge of anxiety and restlessness. A change is imperceptibly overtaking the world. The whole order is disintegrating, the new one is, however, yet to come and history tells us that such ages of restlessness have also been periods of birth for new movements and cultures. This world is in the grip of attention and awaits the coming of Imam Mahdi(A.S), the Messiah.

A significant feature of the present times is the new and widespread trend of Islamic revival. After a long period of stagnation the world of Islam is rising from its stupor. A new awakening has appeared on the horizon and a new life is getting infused into the community of Islam. This trend is visible in every country and at every place especially in the Islamic Republic of Iran and has within its possibilities of becoming the harbinger of a new age.

But the revivalist trend can become the messenger of a new age only if it is accompanied by intellectual revolution- a

thorough appraisal of the intellectual and cultural heritage of Islam and its representatives in the world in the language of today. For completion of this the appearance of Imam Mahdi is important.

After reviewing the various Islamic traditions and opinions of the Muslim scholars, let's now review and walk through a list of what we have learned about the person and the mission and teachings of the Mahdi as he exists in the minds of many of the 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide.

1. The Mahdi is Islam's primary messiah figure.
2. He will be a descendant of Muhammad and will bear Muhammad's name (Muhammad bin Abdullah).
3. He will be a very devout Muslim.
4. He will be an unparalleled spiritual, political and military world leader.
5. He will emerge after a period of great turmoil and suffering upon the earth.
6. He will establish justice and righteousness throughout the world and eradicate tyranny and oppression.
7. He will be the Caliph and Imam (vice-regent and leader) of Muslims worldwide

8. He will lead a world revolution and establish a new world order.
9. He will lead military action against all those who oppose him.
10. He will invade many countries.
11. He will make a seven year peace treaty with a Jew of priestly lineage.
12. He will conquer Israel for Islam and lead the "faithful Muslims" in a final slaughter/battle against Jews.
13. He will establish the new Islamic world headquarters from Jerusalem.
14. He will rule for seven years (possibly as much as eight or nine).
15. He will cause Islam to be the only religion practiced on the earth.
16. He will appear riding a white horse (possibly symbolic).

17. He will discover some previously undiscovered biblical manuscripts that he will use to argue with the Jews and cause some Jews to convert to Islam.

18. He will also re-discover the Ark of the Covenant from the Sea of Galilee, which he will bring to Jerusalem.

19. He will have supernatural power from Allah over the wind and the rain and crops.

20. He will posses and distribute enormous amounts of wealth.

21. He will be loved by all the people of the earth.

Today we are living in the domain of such a noble and exalted Imam (A.S.). It is a pity that we are claiming to be his followers but have departed form the ways dictated and directed by him. If we are sincere in claiming to be his followers, we must be attached to him spiritually to free ourselves form the hardship of this world and the world here-after.

As Muslims we should remember that the prophecy about Mahdi is one that will come to pass. The prophecy however does not absolve the Muslim Ummah from its duty to strive in the cause of Allah, oppose injustice and seek peace and betterment of human conditions. Centuries have passed from the time of the holy prophet and there is a good possibility that many more will expire before the advent of the Mahdi. Muslims who are negligent in their duty hoping for a saviour are commiting a grave mistake and are not following the divine decrees ordained in Quran or taught by the Prophet Muhammad(p.b.u.h).

A brief review of the existence of the Mahdi, Islamic awaited Messiah, the worthy culture of Mahdism and its valuable teachings prove beyond doubt its capability of influencing all aspects of human life which potentially can fulfill the mankind needs in every field.

May Allah increase our " MARFAT" about Imam Mahdi and favour us by following his teachings in letter and spirit in our future lives.

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Abstract

Clash of civilizations or modernity process vs. tradition? That is to say a balanced relationship between physiological, philosophical and psychological needs, avoiding gaps and conflict between generational cultures and civilizations, between traditional education and the dominant culture of today.

Undoubtedly, the dominant culture of today is "western" and technologically westernised. A balanced relationship means avoiding conflict in an otherwise deeply divided society which faces the dramatic confrontation of the inescapable process of modernisation/westernisation with a still deeply rooted tradition. A tradition that is at one and the same time religious, juridical, philosophical and political-institutional.

Samuel Huntington has predicted a "clash of civilizations", and later on he has added: "if not a clash of civilizations, then what?". Despite this catastrophic vision, behind the screen of a westernised vision of Universe, Mankind, and History, and within the framework of an increasingly globalized world, rationality prevails and mathematic deduction contributes to build a society based on a "rational" religion.

In this respect, ideologies – either political and/or religious – often legitimate pragmatic interests, a power-system which is not "anti-state" but a parallel organisational model with its own legal and ethical rules, its own hierarchy of authority, juridical structure and practice, military forces and balanced relationships. This deduction may also bring to a "functional democracy", the reverse of a clash of civilizations.

Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations

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1. A new age is dawning. A new age is dawning, conventionally referred to as the "post-post-bipolar age", the age of non-distance, the age of revolutions and new ideologies, the age of globalisation, the age of a globalised and westernised modernity. The historical frame of reference may point to the Gulf crisis of 1990-1991, marked as the turning-point for the whole system of "security" and international relations: with the disruption of the Soviet Union, it undoubtedly put the final seal on the undisputed political-military and economic-financial superiority of the United States on the one hand, and on the intensification of the process of economic and market globalisation and the build-up of a new world order on the other.

A new world order born of a "Clash of civilizations" or a modernity process vs. tradition? In this last case, that is to say a balanced relationship between physiological, philosophical and psychological needs, avoiding gaps and conflict between generational cultures and civilizations, between traditional education and the dominant culture of today.

Certainly, the dominant culture of today is perceived as "western", scientifically and technologically westernised. A balanced relationship means avoiding conflict in an otherwise deeply divided society which faces the dramatic confrontation of the inescapable process of modernisation/westernisation with a still deeply rooted tradition. A tradition that is at one and the same time religious, juridical, philosophical and cultural as a whole (that is to say, political-institutional, economic and social as well).

Samuel Huntington has predicted a "clash of civilizations", and later on he has added: "if not a clash of civilizations, then what?". Despite this catastrophic vision of absolute nullification, behind the screen of a westernised vision of Universe, Mankind, and History, and within the framework of an increasingly globalised world, rationality can prevail and mathematic deduction contributes to build a society based on a "rational" religion firmly rooted in a Messianic doctrine.

On the threshold of the third millennium, in an atmosphere of anachronisms and contradictions, dominated and conditioned by scientific discoveries, new ideas seem to take flight and

regional barriers are collapsing to give way to a new form of globality. The Information and Communication Revolution is giving way to a new and more frightening revolution, the Bio-Technological Revolution, which is emerging on to the world stage as a new power. In this context, the dominant factors are uncertainty, violence, terror, micro-macro criminality, abuse of power and oppression, regional conflicts and new forms of waging war. Corruption prevails, together with illegal trafficking and crime. The indiscriminate exploitation of the environment adds natural disasters and new forms of human catastrophe. All these realities represent a worrying, new challenge and demand a positive reshaping of civil and political society.

A closer look reveals that one of the major threats for political and civil society derives without any doubt from new inequalities and a new "divarication": the new rich and the new poor, the educated and the ignorant, the philosopher and the scientist, the ideologue and the pragmatic, the powerful and those who - although having riches - have no access to power, etc.

It is concerns such as these which, some years ago, side by side with IT and bio-technology, gave life to new intellectual stimuli destined to have a harsh impact on the third millennium and the new system which men are forging within a new world order: Man and Mankind, History and its Philosophy, Universe and its Laws.

In this respect, the doctrine of Mahdism vs. other contemporary political-social doctrines has a centrality of its own.

The dominant culture of today – technologically and scientifically "Western", westernised and global – is essentially secular: geo-politics, geo-strategy, geo-economics are among the main issues of Western literature when confronting the new order. This trend is forcing scholars, academics, thinkers, government officials and opinion makers to define anew religious-cultural identities in the light of a new set of assumptions about the world and its creation, about universe and cosmos. At the core of it, History, Man and Mankind nourish a new and lively debate. In this specific context,

Mahdism and its capability for theorizing as a doctrine can acquire a new centrality, the kernel of this debate, giving rise to issues which are at the heart *also* of Western societies and their philosophical tradition.

At the dawn of the third millennium, in an atmosphere of new conflicts and confrontations, negative conceptions and grim fantasies of the past persist, stereotyping through electronic media highly diabolic images of the Other, rather than pursuing truth and the promotion of goodwill. Vis-à-vis this objective environment, Samuel Huntington sternly predicted a "clash of civilizations". And within this "clash", the Islamic threat to the West continues to appear as an ever impending factor. Conversely, Islam perceives the West as a positive menace to its own life and system.

Hence, clash of civilizations can become a clash of different (and sometimes deeply differing) philosophies, giving life to different power-systems, competing for legitimacy and seeking media attention. Sometimes, they operate secretly and from "underground networks", using similar tactics and "front organizations" to legitimate power and business – today we can speak in terms of "globalised business" within a globalised power-system.

Ideologies – either political and/or religious – legitimate pragmatic interests, an economic power-system which is not "anti-state" but a parallel organisational model with its own legal and ethical rules, its own hierarchy of authority, juridical structure and practice, military forces and balanced relationships: a levelling "functional global democracy" uprooting individual tradition and identity.

Against such a pessimistic backdrop, a different path can take shape. Deduction – mathematic and philosophical at the same time – may also bring to the reverse of a clash of civilizations. *It becomes obvious that a reciprocal, cultural relationship must continue* behind and beyond clashes and stern confrontations. It must involve society in its entirety, amalgamating it, creating new links between civil society and political society, creating new cultural links between peoples and their individual societies. Through an accurate balance between scientific and technological development on the one

hand, and the preservation of ancient traditions and cultural identity on the other, it makes possible social and economic justice. Both form the basis of stable political-social doctrines, order, security and development.

Islam – with its own religious-juridical culture and reality – can no longer be disregarded. The teachings of "Mahdism" can represent a pivotal moment, a key-factor on the stage of history. The sentence "the world is a global village" is a well-known cliché. But this global village is pluralistic in a religious and cultural sense as well, and within this global village Islamic civilisation has forged its own order and dimension, the response to foreign challenges, to the integration of Islamic order and philosophical doctrines into the Western secular/economic system.

Without going into the details of another long, sometimes thorny topic, in the following discourse I purposefully leave aside both the political-strategic dimension and ensuing military-security issues on the one hand, and inter-religious issues on the other. There are more appropriate forums and authoritative scholars. Conversely, I wish to focus my attention on some realities and their beneficial experience: *history* and *education*. Both have a role to play.

Certainly, following a precise line of thought, clash of civilizations can become a clash of different and sometimes deeply differing power-systems, competing for legitimacy, seeking media attention. Sometimes, they do operate secretly and from "underground networks", using similar tactics and "front organizations" to legitimate power and business. However, within this spectrum and behind the screen, there can be space for factors to emerge, and encourage negotiation, interaction, dialogue, discussion *and convergence*. The last, in particular, must not disregard tradition, our individual cultural tradition. It must not disregard the *de facto* and *de jure* equation that today is at the core *also* of the Islamic world's inescapable modernisation process and its doctrines: that is to say Modernity vs. Tradition and Identity.

This means a sober evaluation of our philosophical doctrines and schools, an in-depth and inward-looking understanding of

central teachings – such as "Mahdism". This means reject any "westernised" model of modernity, reject wrong or manipulated ideas/ideologies, and prepare scientific answers to superstitions.

Obviously, these notes are the reflection of my academic life and personal experience. Both as a Catholic and as a human being, I have spent many years in the Islamic world, sharing with my many Muslim friends sorrow and grief, joyful days and merry events: mutually beneficial relationships, which have largely contributed to shaping some of my worldviews.

2. History. A new global history and new methodological approaches. The long record of strained relations also between Muslims and the West must not detract from the fact that there is much in common, and much to be said and achieved. At the dawn of the third millennium, the thread of history takes us back to a new methodological approach. There is a clear worldwide perception that a new version of history is required, and we are moving towards a new "global history" and new methodological approaches, which must be at one and the same time multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary.

Through different methodological approaches they opened up a doctrinal debate on "tradition", focusing on its various dimensions and individual realities. The environment, architecture and landscapes, archaeology, philology and linguistics, religion and literary studies (based on both written sources and memories), anthropology and ethno-anthropology, all converged in this new trend to meet and draw new cultural pictures. Moralising accounts, fine descriptions, erudite reports, evocative historical chronicles, social-anthropological analyses lavishly illustrated this vast world and its past, inhabitants and costumes. Finely chiselled personalities emerged from the dust of legend, and animated chronicles and historical accounts with the many challenges they had to face and confront with vis-à-vis an ever impending Europe, an increasingly strategically dominant United States and an increasingly westernised modernity.

These studies assumed considerable importance. One point they had in common: the debate centred round one special equation, that it to say "identity vs. modernity". By the end of the last century this issue had given life to a new and no less controversial debate.

At that point, history dissociated itself from the dominant geopolitical, geo-strategic and economic culture. With a speculative lucidity, it abandoned any purely theoretical and virtual position, that often denies scientific value to "history" and historiography in particular, in favour of a more pragmatic approach. The most relevant studies began to move along a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach, which views the study of regional history without neglecting the albeit many facets of its reality, and its traditional and complex structure. Rather, they viewed the diversity and multiplicity of historical facts and depicted them always bearing in mind the broader "global" framework and context. The "material culture" comes in, not so much and no longer as an alternative and atheistic approach to history and the universe (as it was only a few decades ago), but as a key to the understanding of facts and events, a no less precious clue to the re-reading of literature and all available sources through rational deduction from texts.

Here, the Mahdism teachings, theories and culture enter.

Undoubtedly, the intellectual world is facing a new historiographical debate, a debate into which the Islamic world has also entered and plays a central role. Knowledge and the vision of the world and its new order are translated into a new philosophy of culture and history. Rationality, historicity of scientific knowledge, nature and experience, nature and human *ratio,* science and ethics, science and its language, dialogue and the great monotheistic religions and/or Messianic doctrines, revolution and power, politics, force and its use...these are among the main themes most discussed and heard of also in the traditional culture of the ordinary people.

This millennium's new age is moving its steps within this new cultural dimension and is also witnessing a new phenomenon, that is to say a "global history". It takes form. And the so far undisputed scientific and technological superiority of the West must once again confront itself with

generational gaps and contradictions, must confront itself with a new re-reading of its own culture and philosophy. Hence, on this precise stage and behind the screen of Huntington's "clash of civilizations", the West and its destiny – with its eternal dialectic between economics and society, between society and religion, between formal *ratio* and the relativity of cultures, its antitheses between culture and civilisations – provoke further reflections. Such considerations place at the heart of this new debate "the crisis of Western civilization", which, with the end of the Cold War and the bio-technological revolutions, has to re-think its own speculative parameters, its traditional paradigms and models of Universe and Cosmos, Mankind and Statehood, Society and Power. In the eyes of this new intellectual trend, the West appears to have lost (or eliminated) its spirituality and spiritual values, merging all its forms in the material and economic dimension of life. It is a West which, in the eyes of most people, is decidedly new and different to that of the past, a West which Islam can counter with new cultural challenges and systemic-structural answers.

The importance of history as the discipline capable of enhancing "our knowledge of Man" had already been stressed by Fu'ad al-Shayb in the course of a Seminar held in Cairo in the nineteen-seventies of the last century, when he stated that the existence of a conflicting approach to the study of history "is a healthy sign" that ought to be encouraged. Muslim cultural debate is by now privileging such new methodological lines. History can no longer be a recurrent event, representing itself endlessly as if it resembled a concatenation of birth and death, love and hatred, fear and revenge, battle and truce. To write history is a sort of pioneering adventure, a conquest. Seen in this light, human civilisation – in all its varied spiritual and material aspects – becomes a succession of experiences and their cross-fertilisation, a mimesis of ideas and opinions, bringing together researchers and scholars. Consequently, human progress can be seen also as a transcendental-dialectical movement, full of premises and benefits. In this scheme of things, history does not represent the usurpation of God's sovereignty and legitimacy, unassailably placed beyond the realm of human endeavour. Having man as its subject,

history has to be the biography of a constant struggle to overcome human nature, to read and understand the past in order to live the present and plan the future, to explore other philosophical theories of history and work out the modalities of rejecting any "clash of civilizations" and develop a better, mutual understanding.

3. Man and his spiritual values. Beyond this new technological and economic dimension, Man and the spiritual dimension of human existence are a critical factor that cannot be disregarded. Modernisation, progress, efficiency, growth, production do not clash with principles such as science and philosophy, social justice, human rights, economic progress and democracy, or with Man's inherent need to transcend and reach out to the Creator.

The global trend of the resurgence of Islam, observable all over the world, does not mean either an unhappy existence or militancy, which must renounce hope of peaceful process of coexistence. Nor it means a compulsory process of "westernised" modernity uprooted from its cultural tradition and identity. It is a orderly and harmonious universe in its nature and direction, regulated by one single Law which binds all its parts in harmonious and orderly sequence. The task of human beings is to receive, to respond to, to adapt and apply the immutable characteristics of Divine rules. The human intellect – although refined, ambitious, scientific, educated, learned – well, the human intellect has always to swim in the sea of the unknown. Nevertheless, these human activities do not conflict with development and technology; they are a rational religion; they are mathematics and philosophy; they constitute progress and result in gradual improvement, within the harmony of the cosmic order and its superior Laws. They must take place within pre-determined perimeters and on the basis of a fixed axis. Man religious instinct is a reflection of the organic structure of the cosmos and its interrelated components. The nature of Islamic society is a universal community, which goes beyond the narrow enclave of geographical boundaries, political frontiers, race, colour and language. Within this dimension, the Arabs unquestionably

undertook the unique mission of infusing their lives with Islam, and provided other peoples and communities with the divine Law and its theological-juridical principles.

Seen in this perspective, it seems hard to deny that Islam is a system, a way of life, a process of political, institutional, socio-economic, military *and spiritual-philosophical construction*. It is a comprehensive movement, tuned by the religious factor, where history has turned full circle. It is not a faint-copy of Western-inspired nationalism.

This perception is more and more coming to the fore *vis-à-vis* the Western secular trend, and the globalising geo-economic dimension that this West is shaping for the newly dawning world order.

In like manner, Islam is also a comprehensive rational order, where common sense, pragmatic choices, religious feeling, mysticism, Messianic doctrine, higher idealism and altruistic concern for humanity's well-being constantly act and interact. The doctrine of Mahdism is intrinsic part of this comprehensive order, as it is intrinsic part of other religions and political-social realities.

Nationalism, socialism, democracy have their own Islamic dimension, within an Islamic order.

But, referring in particular to the speculative sphere, unquestionably the humanities, the arts and fine arts, crafts and those special domains of traditional culture still have a great creative function within a mutually beneficial social-human dimension of life.

Let us see, for instance, the reflection of this conception of Life and Universe on Islamic fine arts. Man and his spiritual values come to the fore and forge positive philosophical theories. Nature and landscape are perceived by painters and architects with those formal, stylistic and technical characteristics which strongly reflect the impact with a world which lives its life in close, intimate contact with nature. It is a world and a culture which observe nature and the cosmos and perceive them in every detail over the slow rhythmical march of days and nights, of the seasons and the lunar cycles. It is a world often at odds with nature for its very survival, it is a world which conditions nature and is conditioned by it in its turn, a

world often perceived in its tension with uncertainty and the blind recklessness of modern-contemporary times. It is a culture which - in the struggle to know, to understand the celestial cosmos and its rules, to grasp the secrets of the whole universe - has to grapple with this universe for its own life and survival in peace and at war. And when it perceives it as a science, it uses knowledge - or the human ratio - through which Man comes nearer to God and to that infinite, spherical and perfect universe which He created, and of which Man feels himself to be an intimate harmonious part.

4. Within this system, today Education has a role to play. At the dawn of the third millennium, education should not be confined to reading and studying a few course books. Education is the vital basis on which a strong and firm cultural structure and institutional order must be built. No institutional structure, no cultural order can function without a proper system of education. This holds true for any order, Islamic as well as Western.

Therefore, looking at education as a comprehensive process to be shared by the family, the society and the public institutions, it would seem congruous that, within an Islamic order, the educational system should reflect Islam, in harmony with its structural and organisational dimension. This means to break down certain barriers and enter history with its cultural heritage, its various components and historical phases, irreplaceable evidence of the region's peoples and of the cultural influences there exercised by other "worlds" with their individual cultures and respective models of organising "space and time". This also means to complement textual evidence with material data provided by other sources (for example, archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, monumental evidence, anthropology, sociology). This also means awareness of the doctrine of Mahdism and its culture.

Referring to younger generations, the importance of harmonious physical and spiritual development needs to be underlined. Hence, three areas stand out in bold relief among educational-cultural priorities: (1) elementary education and literacy; (2) scientific, technical and vocational education; (3)

Islam in education. Within this dimension, confidence building lies at the core of any healthy and constructive educational system, being in its turn the only solid basis for any cultural growth. Keeping all this in mind, we come to a fourth priority: (4) education for leadership, forging leaders and managers, who can pave the way to build a better world order, joining their minds and hands to erect this order on co-existence and cooperation, leaving aside any marked confrontation. This means building the character of future generations, too, with highest sense of honour, integrity, selfless service to the nation and sense of responsibility, so that they are fully equipped to play their role in the various branches of social, economic and political life. According to a Tradition (*hadith*), "the test of man depends upon his standard of morality in every walk of life, his elements, principles... Character means a bundle of virtues, the highest sense of honour and integrity, and that you will not sell your principles for anything in the world, however tempting it may be. These are the characteristics which go to make a community. When a test comes, a crisis arises, if you live up to these virtues, no one on the surface of the earth can defeat you".

Therefore, it follows that human resources, today, are not only a priority from the mere economic point of view, which means a pre-condition for creating better business opportunities. They represent also one of the essential factors of what is known as "human security" within a context of peace and stability. Social structures have been profoundly transformed in the last decades, in spite of the apparently enduring maintenance of tradition and close links with the past. Modernisation, increasing urbanisation, industrial development, new sophisticated technologies are among the most important components of a global social transformation that Islam - and Muslim leaders - cannot ignore. The human dimension of security in society is gaining more and more attention in our "global village". Issues related to the promotion of human development - such as education, employment, job security, job safety, community/cultural value systems are increasingly recognised as necessary means to strengthen

state security, and, side by side with political security, to reinforce regional stability and the world order.

In this respect, Islam - as a theological-juridical system - is certainly called upon to play a more active role in promoting co-ordination for a comprehensive human resources development strategy. In this respect, we are facing a well documented identity and culture no longer neglected or ignored vs. a Westernised modernity. We are confronted with solid and well documented reality, which provides a new impending model of identity.

Mahdism may also cast new light upon a crucial issue, that is "identity" (change and resistance in societies), through a special lens and without undermining the roots of a traditional culture and its vigorous heritage, preserving its own life and system notwithstanding a very rapidly developing society. Within this anthropological dimension, relationships are viewed beyond myth and the veil of legend and shared in cooperation with the impending factor of a "westernised" modernisation with its concrete, pragmatic culture.

What is required is reinvention, new definitions of the purpose of formal-informal education, and its role. As already stated at the beginning of this paper, IT has started playing an ever important role in the last decades, forging a more and more globalised world. Nevertheless, improving the flow of information flows does not prevent organisations from remaining substantially bureaucratic and inflexible. IT can certainly help leaders "to run their bureaucratic systems a little more efficiently", as David Osborne (Managing Partner of the Public Strategies Group - co-author of Reinventing Government) puts it, and he seems to be right when he adds that IT cannot be considered a strategy in itself, but just a tool to promote reinvention. Success in reinvention is based on the community's historical and traditional force. One of the forces they can resort to in this process is the customary relevance of the personal relationship between the leader and the lead in traditional Islamic communities and society. It is a force and a lever that in the past had a strong impact on the local peoples, a strength that should not be lost today, but rather re-designed and adapted to modern realities, to help improve the

performance and flexibility of modern organisations. Thus, beyond the new technological and economic dimension, Man and the spiritual dimension of human existence are a critical factor that cannot be disregarded. Modernisation, progress, efficiency, growth, production do not clash with principles such as social justice and economic progress, or with Man's inherent need to transcend and reach out to the Creator and the doctrine of Mahdism.

The social resistance emerging from the overlapping between the concept of modernisation and the concept of westernisation has obviously encouraged researchers to search for identity, translating this social resistance into forms. And one of these forms can be the "home environment". The perceptual and collective identities in domestic spaces are part of the whole: the process of identification, the phenomenon of continuity and change of identity in home environment through the various phases of life and history.

Encouraging the creation of knowledge and a cultural shift, through the most genuine Islamic human values, changing the motivations and skills of the young generations, and promoting inter-cultural dialogue should be among the main challenges of an Islamic order and of Islamic – and non-Islamic – leaders to day.

In conclusion: Clash of civilizations or modernity process vs. tradition? That is to say a balanced relationship. it is well possible to say that the philosophical challenge still stands, especially when referring to political and/or economic relations. However, knowledge and the vision of the world and its new order can be translated into a new philosophy of culture and history. As stated above, rationality, historicity of scientific knowledge, nature and experience, nature and human ratio, science and ethics, science and its language, dialogue and the great doctrines of past eras and the present...become as many crucial themes to be discussed and constructively dealt with. Here, tradition takes form, emerges as a result of mankind's need for a certain predictability, it becomes a relevant element in the traditional culture of the ordinary people and can constructively confront Huntington's clash of civilizations.

It is only by knowing "from within", through history, education and dialogue, that we may shape a new world order, beyond any westernised conceptual framework or intellectual stimuli from any outside world and "its" culture. Within such an enlarged perspective – which today is no longer virtual but an inescapable reality in terms of both global politics, order-peace, risks-threats – Islam acquires an instrumental importance and plays the crucial role of cultural "tactical" component and key-factor on the stage of this historical process. New generations must be forged, and the renewal must occur naturally, from "within" and by democratic means.Utopia, myth or reality?

Spiritual Dimensions of Mahdism in the Modern Age

ZAHUL Al-Haq

Introduction

There is widespread evidence in the Ahadith literature, of the emergence of Imam Mahdi and the implications that this will have for the future of the Muslim Ummah.

The Holy Prophet (Peace be upon Him) said: "Even if the entire duration of the world's existence has already been exhausted and only one day is left (before the day of judgement), Allah will expand that day to such a length of time, as to accommodate the kingdom of a person from my Ahlul-Bayt who will be called by my name. He will fill out the earth with peace and justice as it will have been full of injustice and tyranny (by then)," (Tirmidhi).

There are numerous other Ahadith which also detail the coming of Imam Mahdi, and describe the events that will follow his emergence. There is no doubt in the minds of the majority of the Ulema, both Sunni and Shia, regarding the veracity of such Ahadith. However, there is much debate as to when Imam Mahdi will emerge and proclaim his *Khilafat*. Evidence from Ahadith indicates that Imam Mahdi will appear near the time of *Qiyamat* (Day of Judgement). This paper will not deal with this issue, but will instead examine the nature of the leadership of Imam Mahdi. His leadership will have a dual role, one aspect will be political and the other spiritual. It is the spiritual aspect of his *Khilafat*, and its profound effect on the lives of all the Muslims throughout the world, which will be discussed.

Restoration of Justice and Equality

Muslims throughout the world eagerly await the arrival of Imam Mahdi, this is because Imam Mahdi will restore justice and equality in the world, and help to unite the Muslims. It is therefore not surprising, that many Muslims are perhaps a little impatient with regard to the emergence of Imam Mahdi. Currently the Muslim Ummah is in a state of constant turmoil, and the worldwide political and moral situation of the Muslims is in chaos. The leadership of the Muslim Ummah is an eclectic mix of tyrants and puppets appointed by Western governments, who either serve their pay masters or themselves. For example, the reign of terror exhibited until recently in Iraq, by Saddam Hussein. In other words the leadership of the Muslims is in a state of complete disarray. This disastrous situation has had a very negative effect, not only on the individual Muslims in those countries, but also for the Muslim Ummah as a whole. Part of this negativity is reflected in the moral decay prevalent in Muslim communities, where Muslims are preoccupied with the acquisition of wealth, status, and pandering to their physical desires.

The emergence of Imam Mahdi will result in the complete annihilation of corrupt and tyrannical regimes in the Muslim world. One of the most important aspects of the role that Imam Mahdi will fulfil is the restoration of justice and equality throughout the earth. The restoration of justice and equality will include removal of all material and political injustices. For example, the current so called 'war on terror' and other human rights abuses will all be eliminated. However, it is important to bear in mind that Imam Mahdi will ultimately bring about global change in the form of social justice for all the peoples of the world. The reformation process will not be based on the implementation of man's law, but that of Allah s.w.t.'s law. The removal of evil from the world will also result in a change in the nature of Muslims and how they deal and relate to each other. Old hatreds will disappear, false beliefs and practices will be abandoned, and a sense of true Muslim brotherhood will spread throughout the Muslim world, as was witnessed at the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.).

Spiritual Reawakening

There is a dire need for a spiritual reawakening within the psyche of the Muslims, many of whom have tried to seek answers in different ideologies, which are alien to Islam e.g. feminism, secularism, liberalism and rationalism. A spiritual vacuum exists in the hearts of many Muslims, who in a futile attempt to understand and fill this gap; have sought answers elsewhere. The result; unfortunately has been the creation of a bizarre mix of new ideologies which combine various aspects of Islam, and attempt to fuse other ideologies with Islamic thinking. Allah s.w.t states in the Holy Quran, "This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen Islam for you as your religion' (5:3), yet Muslims continue to seek guidance through man-made solutions. This situation in part, is due to ignorance, but there are those who are not satisfied with the solutions provided by Islam, and continue to search for answers through other avenues.

There is little doubt that, in the Western world, that the general population is not happy with the current situation in their daily lives. This crisis has resulted in the creation of a multi-million dollar industry, the ubiquitous self help book. In 2005, ninety million pounds was spent on buying self help books in the United Kingdom[1]. This clearly illustrates that there is an unfulfilled need in the lives of ordinary people, who are looking for personal contentment, beyond that which money and the acquisition of ever more material goods can satisfy. The remedy for this situation is ultimately found in the spiritual condition of the heart, which has become diseased, not only physically but also spiritually. The heart has been deprived of spiritual nourishment for so long that, individuals have in many respects relinquished their responsibility in fulfilling its spiritual needs. This neglect manifests itself in many different ways from depression, anxiety to mental illness. In the United Kingdom, depression has overtaken unemployment, as the number one social problem[2].

This situation then raises, a very important question, how do we deal with the spiritual needs of the heart? The answer to

this question cannot be found in a medical journal or from a psychiatrist. The remedies for the illnesses of the heart are found in the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). Some of the greatest Muslim thinkers and mystics have shown us how the heart can be cleansed, and restored to a state of spiritual equilibrium. Imam Ghazali and Maulana Rumi are but two of the most famous Muslim thinkers, who spent a life time studying how the heart can be purified, through the remembrance of Allah s.w.t.

Imam Mahdi will help to alleviate the personal problems faced by millions of people all over the world. He will have a direct connection with all the souls of every living person and as a consequence be able to remove their sense of isolation and loneliness. His persona will radiate with the minds of the people, and when he speaks it will seem as if he is personally speaking to each individual. Every action that he performs will be a source of direct guidance and therefore no mentoring or tutoring will be required.

There are some Muslims, who think that they can live their lives without the need for spiritual fulfilment. This view is both misguided and ill informed, one only needs to look at the life of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon Him), to see that he was a deeply spiritual person. The Holy Prophet's (Peace be upon Him) spirituality manifested itself in many different ways, for example he would regularly spend part of the night in *Tahajjud* prayer. He fought many battles throughout his life and conquered many lands but all these achievements did not detract him from his spirituality; he always maintained his spiritual link with Allah s.w.t. Imam Mahdi will continue the tradition of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon Him) and spread the message of spiritual reawakening. Much has been written about the emergence of Imam Mahdi and the events that will follow his arrival, but the spiritual role that he will play in the lives of Muslims has been overlooked.

The life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) is full of examples of his inner spirituality; it was an integral part of his character and was reflected in his actions. It is for this reason, that he is the best example for the whole of humanity; however his example is no longer followed by all Muslims. The Sunnah

of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) is in decline and is the object of ridicule amongst many Muslims. For example, Muslims who keep long beards are mocked by fellow Muslims; what Muslims do not realise is that by demeaning the Sunnah, they are also insulting the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). Imam Mahdi will epitomise the characteristics of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and will promote spiritual well-being in the Ummah. All of the prophets who came before the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) preached a message of inner peace combined with living a life of righteousness.

This then raises the important question, what is the purpose of spiritual enlightenment? The simple answer to this complex question is that, spiritual enlightenment allows the believer to make a connection with his creator i.e. the believer is able to reach a higher plane of understanding and is able to remove the shackles of his earthly vices, which weaken his spiritual well-being. However, only exceptional individuals can make this connection by themselves, the vast majority of people require some form of guidance or instruction in order to establish a true link with Allah s.w.t. Imam Mahdi will be the conduit by which Muslims will be able to create a relationship with their Lord. This is a common Islamic practice, whereby a pupil of a particular *Sheikh* or spiritual guide, will be guided spiritually so that he or she can attain a higher state of understanding or realisation. Once this realisation process has been completed, the purification process can then be initiated, before the student is finally able to make a spiritual connection with Allah s.w.t. It is important to understand the relationship between the *Sheikh* and his student, this particular dynamic is nowadays greatly misrepresented. It has its basis in the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), where the *Sahabah* gave their allegiance to the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon Him). By giving their allegiance or *Bayat* they entered into a sacred contract, whereby they agreed to live a life of righteousness. This tradition has continued throughout Islamic history, mainly by the Sufis and their followers.

When Imam Mahdi finally emerges, all the Muslims of the world will be required to give *Bayat* to him, by doing so they will be entering into a sacred covenant; that will require them

to follow the Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). To follow the Quran and Sunnah does not mean that we simply adhere to a set of prescribed rituals, without understanding the reasons behind them and the benefits that they provide for the true believer.

The *Bayat* of Imam Mahdi will connect everyone directly to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). Furthermore, all current *Bayats* to existing spiritual guides will become null and void and no further *Bayats* will be accepted other than that of Imam Mahdi.

One of the greatest ills facing the Muslim Ummah today; is that many Muslims have simply reduced Islam to a set of rituals which they follow blindly without any understanding or comprehension of their significance. This spiritual vacuum has consequently resulted in some Muslims becoming disillusioned with their faith, and have sought answers outside the fold of Islam, with disastrous consequences e.g. following strange cults who have attempted to create their own version or interpretation of Islam, for example the *Perverzis*, who only believe in the Quran and have rejected all Ahadith. These groups have renounced all the orthodox Islamic teachings, so that they could create their own religion. We need to be very careful when studying Islam because there are many Ahadith which warn Muslims about the dangers of introducing innovations (*Bidat*) into Deen. The following Ahadith warns about the dangers of *Bidat*.

It was narrated on the authority of Abu Najih al-Irbad bin Sariyah, *radiyallahu 'anhu*, who said:

The Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam*, delivered an admonition that made our hearts fearful and our eyes tearful. We said, "O Messenger of Allah, it is as if this were a farewell sermon, so advise us." He said, "I enjoin you to have *Taqwa* of Allah and that you listen and obey, even if a slave is made a ruler over you. He among you who lives long enough will see many differences. So for you is to observe my *Sunnah* and the *Sunnah* of the rightly-principled and rightly-guided successors, holding on to them with your molar teeth.

The Emergence of Imam Mahdi

Beware of newly-introduced matters, for every innovation *(bid'ah)* is an error. (Abu Dawud & Al-Tirmidhi, who says it is an authentic Hadith)

Imam Mahdi will not declare his arrival or make himself known publicly. This implies that he will be a man imbued with great spirituality and humility. If he was looking to further a personal agenda based on gaining political power he would make himself known to the whole world. This is a trait consistent with ordinary political leaders who need to feed their egos in order to satisfy their desire for leadership and conquest. However, the *Auwliyah*, friends of Allah, do not seek to follow their *nafs* (desire) but instead seek only the pleasure of Allah s.w.t. and work to establish his Deen on the earth. His humility will also be a sign of his inner spirituality, which will be evidenced by his initial unwillingness to accept the Khilafat of the Ummah.

Only the pious will be able to recognise Imam Mahdi, this is indicative of the fact that his leadership and acceptance of the *Khilafat* of the Ummah will be based on *Taqwa*, God consciousness and not on his own desire (*nafs*). In other words, he will win the hearts and minds of the Muslims and lead them under the banner of righteousness, as opposed to his military might or political prowess.

Imam Mahdi will be seen performing *Tawaf*in Mecca during the period of Hajj. He will be completely unaware of the fact that the pious Muslims will search for him, and insist that he accepts the *Khilafat* of the Ummah. However, Imam Mahdi will initially resist all attempts by the *Saliheen* (pious) to persuade him to become the leader of all the Muslims. He will eventually with great reluctance accept the *Khilafat*; his unwillingness will be a testament to his strength of character and spiritual enlightenment. The unique aspect of Imam Mahdi will be that he will not be elected in a democratic

process, but will be chosen by Allah s.w.t., and as a consequence he will be identified only by devout Muslims. His inner light, i.e. his deep spiritual presence will be not be apparent to those who are corrupt, immoral and debase. Their hearts will have been blackened by the numerous sins that they have committed, that no goodness will enter it, and as a result they will be oblivious to the emergence of Imam Mahdi.

The *Karamat* (miracles) of Imam Mahdi

One of the characteristics of Imam Mahdi will be the power given to him by Allah s.w.t to perform various *Karamat*, miracles. These miracles will be a testament of his divine appointment as Allah s.w.t's vicegerent on the earth. Once the Muslims of the world witness the *Karamat* of Imam Mahdi, they will not be able to deny his claim to the *Khilafat* of the Ummah. One example of the direct help that Imam Mahdi will receive from Allah s.w.t. will be his defeat of *Sufyaani. Sufyaani* will be a man from the family of Abu Sufyan, and he will emerge from Damascus and conduct a ruthless campaign of bloodshed and mass killing, during which thousands of innocent people will be slaughtered. He will be supported by the people of the tribe of *Kalb.*

Sufyaani will despatch his army to Mecca in order to destroy Imam Mahdi, however Imam Mahdi's army will easily defeat *Sufyaani's* army. *Sufyaani* will then lead a separate contingent of his remaining army to face Imam Mahdi himself. This army will subsequently be destroyed by an enormous earthquake at *Baidaa* on the road to Mecca. The rear of the army will be destroyed first, and when the remaining army retreats to see the devastation that has taken place, they will also be destroyed by an earthquake. When news of the manner of the defeat of *Sufyaani's* army spreads, the pious peoples of the world will come to give their allegiance to Imam Mahdi. All doubt will be removed from the hearts of the righteous as to the divine mission given to Imam Mahdi by Allah s.w.t.

The Spiritual Dimensions of Imam Mahdi's Leadership

Imam Mahdi will lead the Ummah by promoting righteousness and re-establishing the *Shariah* throughout the

world. However, he will not use military might or political persuasion to bring people back to the path of righteousness. He will instead spread a message of spiritual harmony, and encourage all the peoples of the world to look inside their hearts, and conduct a moral audit of their spiritual well-being. This moral audit will consist of the application of two important aspects of spiritual awareness, *Muhasibah* and *Murakibah*. The process of *Muhasibah* involves an inward examination of ones actions, and an assessment of the rights and wrongs of the subsequent behaviour according to the principles of the *Shariah*. *Murakibah* on the other hand, is whereby the individual calculates the number of good and bad deeds perpetrated with a view to changing their behaviour. This process of introspection has been used by the Sufis for centuries as means of removing the illnesses of the heart. Once the problems of the heart have been rectified, the individual can then lead a more productive and meaningful life, where the ego is subdued, and the needs of others are put before the individuals. This is the start of the journey on the path to spiritual enlightenment, which will culminate in the true believer making a spiritual connection with their Creator. In effect, what Imam Mahdi will be promoting is a continuation of the mission of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), who preached a message of personal responsibility based on remedying the individuals' heart through a process of continually remembering Allah s.w.t.

Imam Mahdi's message of spiritual revival will be facilitated by the example that he will set for others to follow, consequently when people observe the inner peace and spiritual contentment visible on his face; they will automatically be drawn to his message of spiritual renewal. No other world leader apart from the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) propagated such a message of spiritual renaissance. It is commonly not well understood that the core of the message brought by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon) was one of spiritual enlightenment coupled with a practical means on how to achieve this goal.

The following Ahadith of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) illustrates the importance of protecting

the heart and the consequences of neglecting its spiritual needs.

On the authority of Abu 'Abdullah al-Nu'man bin Bashir, *radiyallahu 'anhu*, who said: I heard the Messenger of Allah, *sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam*, say:

"Truly, what is lawful is evident, and what is unlawful is evident, and in between the two are matters which are doubtful which many people do not know. He who guards against doubtful things keeps his religion and honour blameless, and he who indulges in doubtful things indulges in fact in unlawful things, just as a shepherd who pastures his flock round a preserve will soon pasture them in it. Beware, every king has a preserve, and the things Allah has declared unlawful are His preserves.

Beware, in the body there is a flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt, and behold, it is the heart." (Bukhari & Muslim)[4]

There is also direct evidence in the Holy Quran where Allah s.w.t. stresses the importance of protecting and caring for the heart:

Truly he succeeds that purifies it, and truly he fails that corrupts it! (91:9-10)

If Muslims are spiritually aware then they will behave according to the *Sunnah* and as a consequence the whole of society will benefit from their good example. Many of the problems that plague Muslims today can be rectified by cleansing the heart of its impurities. These are not physical impurities, such as blocked arteries; but rather the spiritual decay of the heart resulting from continued neglect, with no attention being paid to the needs of the heart.

There are many laws within the *Shariah* which are designed to protect both the individual and society at large. However, the behaviour of the *Sahabah*, the companions of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon Him), was guided by their deep spiritual awareness of Islam, as opposed to a superficial adherence to the laws enshrined in the *Shariah*. If we compare their example to the situation in the world today, it then becomes self-evident that our behaviour is based on the needs of the *nafs* and not on spirituality. *Shariah* law enables

the Islamic state to govern the people, but it cannot legislate on how the heart should behave in any given situation. The condition of the heart can only be altered by the continual remembrance of Allah s.w.t.

Why is spirituality such an important aspect of Imam Mahdi's leadership? Is it not conceivable that he would rule as other political or military rulers have done in history? The answer to this question lies in the nature of Imam Mahdi i.e. the essence of his inner being, in other words he will be an exceptional individual who will be chosen by Allah s.w.t. The only other people who are chosen by Allah s.w.t. to fulfil such missions are prophets. This then implies that he cannot be compared to any other type of great leader in history, regardless of their achievements or status amongst the people. Men are driven by their egos and they live for the glory of this world, take for example military dictators who are obsessed with conquest and world domination e.g. Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. There are more recent examples of such self-centred behaviour, Saddam Hussain had enormous statues, and paintings of himself put up throughout Iraq. This is clearly an example of megalomaniacal behaviour, which is designed ultimately to feed the individuals' ego. In contrast to this ego-centric behaviour, the *Sufiya* have dedicated their lives to eliminating all worldly desires by cleansing the heart through the remembrance of Allah s.w.t. This dichotomy clearly illustrates the main difference in outlook between the *Auwliyah*, the friends of Allah s.w.t., and those who have rejected faith for a life of self-indulgence and hedonism. Although it is possible that a leader can be just and lead his people under the banner of righteousness; however these are exceptions to the rule as opposed to the norm. It is the absence of an inner spiritual understanding which prevents them from acting according to their moral principles and not on the basis of their ego.

Spirituality allows the individual to attain a balance between the material world and spiritual world. These individual's who lack faith, clearly do not believe in an afterlife and as a consequence they live only for this world. The belief in a supreme being and a final day of reckoning, when the whole of humanity will be held to account for their actions, enables the

faithful to re-prioritise their behaviour. Spirituality is about reforming the status of the heart and it is the heart which determines whether a person refrains from a particular type of behaviour. If the heart is strong and full of *Iman* (faith) then the believer is protected from acting in contravention of Allah s.w.t.'s law. Spirituality is the glue that binds the individual together in such a way that the world and its problems, short comings, injustice and inequality can be contextualised within Allah s.w.t. grand design. It is only human arrogance which presumes that everything in the material can be ultimately explained by scientific reasoning and logic. Imam Mahdi will show what can be achieved when the heart is cleansed, and the positive effects that these changes will have on the lives of all the peoples of the world.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Imam Mahdi will appear near the day of judgement to restore justice and equality throughout the earth. His message of spiritual revival will be a continuation of the legacy left by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). No one knows when exactly Imam Mahdi will emerge; this situation then raises the question, what are the Muslims of the world to do in the mean time? The current situation around the Muslim world sometimes seems completely hopeless, however even with all the immense obstacles that have been put in the way of Muslims, there is still something that we can do.

A bold vision of spiritual revival has been created at Hijaz College, where the future leaders of the Ummah are being trained, so that one day they will be able to assist Imam Mahdi in his divine mission to re-establish the *Khilafat* under the banner of truth and righteousness. The Hijazi vision encompasses creating a balance between spirituality and modernity, so that the individual can lead the life of a true believer in the modern world, without compromising his or her identity, moral principles, and beliefs. It is therefore vital that we continue to struggle in the way of the Deen to re-establish the *Khilafat* and follow the example of the Holy Prophet

Muhammad (s.a.w.), and that is not to despair or lose hope. As Allah s.w.t. states in the Holy Quran:

"And strive in His cause as ye ought to strive" (22.78)

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THE MAHDI, THE MESSIAH, THE ANTICHRIST: JUSTICE AND SACRED VIOLENCE

Dr Anthony McRoy

INTRODUCTION

To many Westerners, the term 'Mahdi' conjures up two images. The first refers to the Sudanese figure who faced General Gordon, the second to the 'Mehdi Army' – the Iraqi militia linked to Moqtada Al-Sadr. It is noteworthy that both images are associated with anti-Western jihad. Also significant is that the first-mentioned refers to a Sunni claimant, the second to the awaited Twelfth Imam of the Shia. However, it must be recognised that the general public in the West – and to a large extent, Western politicians – are very ignorant about the concept of the Mahdi in either Sunni or Shi'ite Islam. This is also true of my own community, Evangelical Protestants. It is often a surprise to the latter that the figure of Jesus plays a central role in Islamic eschatology, whether Sunni or Shia. The relevant point here is that the ministry of the Mahdi dovetails with that of Jesus. Moreover, the nature of this interaction concerns the concepts of Justice and Sacred Violence.

I use the term 'Justice' to refer to Eschatological Judgment in the first regard, and in the second but inter-related place to refer to the concept of religious Utopia said to be effected by either the coming of the Mahdi (for Muslims) and that of Jesus (for Christians and also Muslims). With respect to the second term I employ it as equivalent to what is sometimes called 'holy war'. I am not making a subjective judgment that such violence is ever *objectively* 'sacred', simply that it is seen as such by its perpetrators and that the said violence is religiously-motivated.

Although papers addressing a theological topic are rarely of direct practical import, this subject is essential for the present situation. Some Christian Zionists, holding to a Dispensationalist Premillennialist standpoint, hope that the Al-Aqsa complex in Jerusalem will be destroyed to make way for the Third Temple which they see as an essential stage in preparing for the Second Coming of Christ. The 1985 film *Shrine Under Siege* by the Israeli filmmaker Ilan Ziv even included suggestions – voiced by the Israeli authorities – that an extremist settler body that carried out terrorist attacks on Palestinians had been armed by one such Christian Zionist group, in the hope that they would blow up the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We can immediately see the link between Eschatology and Sacral Violence as it relates to the Messiah in some interpretations of Christian theology – and I should add a very warped interpretation in my opinion as an Evangelical Christian. In Islamic eschatology, the Mahdi and Jesus are engaged in establishing a millennial regime and in jihad against the Antichrist and eschatological judgment against the infidel. That alone is sufficient cause to study the concept, but another issue is of contemporary political relevance; whether a Shi'ite Islamic State could ever initiate Offensive Jihad apart from the command of the Mahdi.

1. The Mahdi

1.1 Background to the Mahdi concept

The Mahdi as a figure is not explicitly present in the Qur'an, but is common to Sunni and Shia Hadith collections. The fact that the idea is emphasised in both traditions in all likelihood points to an early eschatological expectation arising as a result of the of the theological and constitutional crisis that arose following the death of Muhammad and most probably after the death of Ali, the last of the Four Righteous Caliphs (*Khulafah Rashidun*) in the Sunni tradition and the First Imam of Shia belief. Certainly the prediction of a figure that would effect religious/political revival presupposes a declension! The severing of Muslim unity, the dynastic conflicts that characterised the Ummayad and Abbasid eras, the perception among many Muslims that the current political order was illegitimate would doubtless have enhanced eschatological expectation of a divinely-sent deliverer who would restore Islam to its pristine condition. As such conditions are often perceived to have continued and indeed degenerated in the centuries since then, notably after the collapse of the Ottoman Khilafah in 1924 and with the voracious progress of Western cultural and political dominion since the First World War, it is scarcely surprising that there has been a revival of eschatological expectation in regard to the Mahdi. Khomeini saw a continuity of declension after the death of Ali to the contemporary era, and used it as evidence for his theory of the *Vilayet-i Faqih* ('Guardianship of the Jurist'):

After the death of the Most Noble Messenger (s), the obstinate enemies of the faith, the Umayyads (God's curses be upon them), did not permit the Islamic state to attain stability with the rule of 'Ali ibn Abi Tālib ('a). They did not allow a form of government to exist that was pleasing to God, Exalted and Almighty, and to His Most Noble Messenger (s). They transformed the entire basis of government, and their policies were, for the most part, contradictory to Islam. The form of government of the Umayyads and the Abbasids, and the political and administrative policies they pursued, were anti-

Islamic. The form of government was thoroughly perverted by being transformed into a monarchy... this non-Islamic form of government has persisted to the present day...[1]

1.2 Alid lineage as a central factor in Sunni and Shia traditions of the Mahdi

The central concept of the Mahdi is that of being 'the Rightly-Guided' One. In Islamic terms this refers to someone whose character and conduct, unlike the dictatorship and corruption that has often been the defining quality of many Muslim rulers down to the present, reflect the Sunnah of the Prophet in being 'rightly-guided'.[2] In short, the picture we have is of the ideal Islamic Amir, in many ways a mirror-image of Muhammad. This factor is evidenced by the common tradition of Sunnis and Shia that the Mahdi will be an Alid descendant of Muhammad:

SUNNI	SHIA
Narrated by Ali ibn AbuTalib *Abu Dawud 4270* The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: If only one day of this time (world) remained, Allah would raise up a man from my family...	*Narrated by 'Abd'ullah ibn Mas'ud,* who heard Rasul'ullah ... say: 'The world will not come to an end until a man from my family who will be called al-Mahdi, emerges to rule upon my community.' *Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 51, p. 75.*
Narrated by Umm Salamah, Ummul Mu'minin *Abu Dawud 4271* The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: The Mahdi will be of my family, of the descendants of Fatimah.	*Narrated by* Umm Salama: The Prophet says: 'Mahdi will be among my progeny, among the children of Fatima.' *Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 51, p. 75*

[1] Khomeini, Ayatollah, *Islamic Government*, (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works [International Affairs Division], Translated by Hamid Algar), p. 23.

[2] Nrrated by Anas Ibn Malik
Mishkat Al-Masabih 4587
When the Prophet ...went out to attend to some business he was delighted to hear someone say, "O rightly guided one! O successful one!"
Tirmidhi transmitted it.

Significantly, even Sunni traditions effectively de-legitimise rule by the Ummayads, Abbasids and most, if not all, Muslim rulers down to the present, because they could not claim the required ancestry. Had the Mahdi emerged during the Ummayad epoch it would have been self-evident that their rule was illegitimate. Obviously, were the Mahdi to appear now, probably all rulers in the Sunni world, who cannot claim the necessary descent from Fatimah, would automatically be rendered redundant on this basis alone. This qualification always presented a potential challenge to Sunni or Shia rulers who could not claim Alid descent. It was a potential source of embarrassment to the 'Uthmani (Ottoman) Caliphate. According to the Shafi *madhab*, the Caliph should be an Arab of the Quraysh tribe:

....of the Quraysh tribe (K: because of the (H: well-authenticated (hasan) hadith related by Nasa'i

"The Imams are of the Quraysh,"

a hadith adhered to by the Companions of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and those after them, this qualification being obligatory when there is a member of Quraysh available who meets the other conditions) (H: though when there is not, then the next most eligible is a qualified member of the Kinana tribe, then of the Arabs, then of the non-Arabs)...[3]

Not surprisingly, as Ottoman power began to collapse in the nineteenth century, and Arab nationalism emerged, we find the Ottomans laying emphasis on the Hanafi *madhab* not least because this school of *fiqh* did not insist on Arab ethnicity as a requirement for the Caliphate:

The Hanefi school of Islamic jurisprudence had always been the closest to the hearts of the Ottoman rulers as the 'official belief' (*mezheb-i resmiye*). The reason for this preference was the Hanefi interpretation of the caliphate, whereby a strong and able ruler was to be recognized as the legitimate sovereign of all Muslims on the condition that he protected

[3] Al-Misri, Ahamd ibn Naqib, *The Reliance of the Traveller: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law,* (Delhi: Aamna Publishers, 1991, 1994, translated by Nuh Ha Mim Keller), p. 641.

Islam and upheld the *Şeriat* even if he was not from the original sacred Arab clan of Qureish.[4]

It is well-known that one of the (broken) promises of the British High Commissioner Sir Henry McMahon in Egypt to Hussein, Sharif of Mecca in the 'McMahon-Hussein Correspondence' was to restore 'an Arab Khalifate of Islam'.[5] Perhaps what should be also considered is the potential threat posed to Ottoman power by the emergence of someone claiming to be the Mahdi from Sudan in the late nineteenth century – an Arab (or to be precise, Arabised Nubian) asserting the requisite descent (however dubious the claim). In the later stages of his campaign Muhamamd Ahmad bin Abdullah started to refer to proof texts from the Qur'an and Hadith in support of his position.[6] Interestingly, another Mahdi claimant was Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri (1443-1505), who advanced his claim to the role partly because his father was named 'Abdullah' whilst his mother's name was Aamina (as with the Prophet), and he asserted descent from Imam Hussein. We can see how dangerous to Sunni regimes throughout history down to the present are Mahdist claimants, on the basis of ancestry alone.

With Shia regimes, the situation is more complicated. Since Shi'ites explicitly identify the Mahdi as the Twelfth Imam, it would be difficult for a claimant to advance his pretensions, since the entry into world of the Hidden Imam is held to be both dramatic and miraculous and according to the hadith, no one knows the time of his coming.[7] Nonetheless, this did not

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[4] Deringil, Selim, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), p. 48.

[5] Paris, Timothy J., *Britain, the Hashemites and Arab Rule, 1920-1925: The Sherifian Solution*, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), p. 29.

[6] Warburg, Gabriel, *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in Sudan since the Mahdiyya*, (London: Hurst & Co., 2003), p. 31.

[7] *Usul al-Kafi, H 941, Ch. 82, h 4*

Ahmad has narrated through his chain of narrators from the Imam (a.s.) the following. "Allah disdains to make the people's time set for it (reappearance of the one who will rise with Divine Authority) to come true."

Usul al-Kafi H 920, Ch. 82, h 5

make the position of the Shahs in Iran, notably the last monarch, any easier. Since the revolutionary forces led by Khomeini claimed to be acting in the name of the Twelfth Imam, this in itself undermined the Shah – the son of an army officer who staged a successful military coup, and who rather grandly spoke of Cyrus the Great as his 'ancestor' during the 2,500th celebration of Iranian monarchy in 1971 at Persepolis, rather than any genuine descent from Hussein. Moreover, apart from other factors, Khomeini – and many other revolutionaries – could claim to be Alid *sayyeds*, descendants of the Prophet, and thus linked to the Mahdi in terms of lineage.

1.3 The Revolutionary Challenge of the Mahdi to 'corrupt' and 'unjust' regimes

It was after the deposition and assassination of Ali that the Caliphate effectively became dynastic until its abolition in 1924 (a hadith reflects this), although there were major disruptions until then by coups staged by various figures.[8] The quasi-democratic nature of the election of Abu Bakr (according to Sunni sources) related to the concept of *ijma*, consensus, was largely ignored after the *Khulafa Rashidun* era in terms of selecting an Amir for the Sunni community. This is a crucial issue in examining the concept of the Mahdi. The whole point of his existence is to end sinful governance in the world – in a phrase common to both Sunni and Shia sources, he will 'will fill the earth with justice and equity as it is filled with tyranny and injustice', and will be assisted in some sense by Jesus:

Al-Husayn ibn mmd has narrated from Mu'alla ibn Muhammad from al-Hassan ibn Ali al-Khazzaz from 'Abd al-Karim ibn 'Umar al-Khath'ami from al-Fadl ibn Yasar who has said the following.

"I asked abu Ja'far, 'Is there a definite time for this matter (the rise of al-Mahdi with Divine Authority and power)?" He said, "Those who set a definite time have lied, those who set a definite time have lied, those who set a definite time have lied..."'

[8] Narrated by Utbah ibn Ghazwan

Sahih Muslim 7075

Utbah delivered a sermon and he praised Allah and lauded Him, then said: '...Prophethood does not remain for ever and its impact fades with the result that it changes eventually into kingship. You will soon come to know and experience those rulers who come after us and see (how far they are from religion).

SUNNI	SHIA
Narrated by AbuSa'id al-Khudri *Abu Dawud 4272* The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: The Mahdi ... will fill the earth will equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny, and he will rule for seven years. *Narrated by Umm Salamah, Ummul Mu'minin* *Abu Dawud 4273* The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ... there will arise a man of Quraysh whose maternal uncles belong to Kalb... He will... govern the people by the Sunnah of their Prophet (peace be upon him) and establish Islam on Earth. He will remain seven years, then die, and the Muslims will pray over him. Sahih Al-Bukhari Hadith 4.657 Narrated byAbu Huraira Allah's Apostle said, "By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely (Jesus,) the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you and will judge mankind justly (as a Just Ruler)..." *Narrated by AbuHurayrah* *Abu-Dawud 4310* ... Jesus ... will descend (to the earth)... He will fight the people for the cause of Islam... Allah will perish all religions except Islam. He will destroy the Antichrist and will live on the earth for forty years and then he will die.	*Narrated by 'Ali b. Abi Talib:* ... the Prophet... replied: 'God will conclude His religion through him *[the Mahdi]*, just as He began it with us...' *Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 51, p. 84* *Narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudaris*: I heard the Prophet declare from the pulpit: 'The Mahdi ... will fill the earth with justice and equity as it is filled with tyranny and injustice.' *Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 51, p. 74* Usul al-Kafi H 1380, Ch. 126, h 18 ... it is narrated from abu Sa'id in a *marfu'*manner from abu Ja'far who has said the following. "The Messenger of Allah has said, "From my descendants there will be twelve noble supervisors, who are (Muhaddathun) persons to whom angels speak and very intelligent. The last of them will be *al-Qa'im* ... who will fill the earth with justice after being filled with injustice." It is reported that the Prophet ('s) said, "Among my progeny is the Mahdi. When he emerges, Jesus the son of Mary will descend to help him, then Jesus will send him ahead and pray behind him." (*Bihar al-anwar,* 14, 349)

A major cause of the Sunni-Shia divide was the Shia insistence that the succession to the Prophet had been determined by Muhammad and that Ali had been chosen. Instead, Abu Bakr was elected as Caliph, an action which Shia felt was a usurpation of the divine prerogative. Equally, after the death of the four deputies of the Hidden Imam, another crisis of legitimacy arose – this time within Shi'ism itself. Could there be any legitimate Islamic governance in the absence of the Twelfth Imam? Khomeini's theory of the *Vilayet-i Faqih* was an attempt to resolve this issue. Essentially, a popularly elected government in conjunction with guidance by the *ulema* rules in trust for the Mahdi.[9] However, even in Sunni circles the death of Ali as the final Righteous Caliph has caused questions of constitutional legitimacy – especially as succeeding rulers frequently set aside requirements of the *Shari'ah*. This is especially relevant to the present situation, when we consider the prevalence of unelected and often despotic regimes in the Muslim world, and their transgression of *Shari'ah* principles, most notably in terms of subjection to the West and the abandonment of the Palestinian *waqf* - something for which Khomeini specifically condemned them.[10] The Sunni hadith predicts that the Mahdi will govern of the basis of the Sunnah, and this is also implied in the Shia hadith. Shi'ism places a particular emphasis on justice and in resisting oppressors: 'This emphasis on divine justice has influenced not only the theoretical aspect of Shi'ism, for the Shi'a regard justice as such so fundamental an aspect of Islam that they have often called for its implementation in society.'[11] Hence, the absence of *Shari'ah* governance, the prevalence of injustice and despotism are conditions that the Mahdi is held to remove.

Thus, we can say that the Mahdi is effectively a *revolutionary* figure as opposed to the 'unjust' regimes which characterise much of the Muslim world. This confrontational

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[9] Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, pp. 29, 86.

[10] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

[11] Shomali, Mohammad A., *Shi'i Islam: Origins, Faith & Practices*, (London: ICAS, 2003), p. 93.

aspect of the Mahdi's ministry deserves particular attention. It should be noted that such revolutionary confrontation was a feature of the Mahdist revolt in Sudan:

> ...according to al- Sadiq al-Mahdi, the Mahdi's great grandson, many *'ulama* both in Sudan and Egypt who justified the Mahdi's call for a *jihad* against the Sultan ... for the following reasons. First, they regarded Khedive Tawfiq as unfit to rule and hence the Mahdi, like 'Urabi in Egypt, had a duty to fight against the Egyptian attempt to conquer Sudan. Secondly, every Muslim had a duty to rise against the Ottoman Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II who had betrayed Islam through his support of Christian foreigners. The duty of Muslim unity and submission to the legitimate ruler therefore no longer applied and the Mahdist uprising was fully justified. Thirdly, Islam required an active leader who would implement the laws of religion. It was immaterial whether this role was fulfilled by the Mahdi of Sudan or by someone else.[12]

The 1979 Revolution in Iran possessed the same characteristic. The revolution aimed at establishing legitimate rule – i.e. in the name of the Twelfth Imam, the Mahdi. Significantly, a hadith speaks of the Mahdi's coming as a revolution that involves military preparedness: Imam Sadiq said: 'Prepare yourselves for the revolution of our Qa'im, even if it means to gather an arrow [for fighting God's enemies].' (*Bihar al-anwar* Vol. 52, p. 366).[13] A major feature of the Revolution was the overthrow of the Shah – one of the most autocratic dictators of the twentieth century. The extravagance of the Persepolis celebrations, together with the cruel torture regime of the Shahist secret police SAVAK earned the Shah's regime an unenviable global reputation for injustice. This contrasted with the expectations of socio-political conditions under the Mahdi, and it should be remembered that one hadith from the Twelfth Imam states: 'And surely on my re-

[12] Warburg, *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in Sudan since the Mahdiyya*, p. 36.

[13] Amini, Ayatollah Ibrahim, *Al-Imam al-Mahdi, The Just Leader of Humanity,* (London: Translated by Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina, 1996), http://al-islam.org/mahdi/nontl/Chap-12.htm

appearance, whenever I reappear, there will be no allegiance in my neck of any of the oppressive tyrants' *(Bihar al-anwar,* v.53, p 181). Perhaps we should call the 1979 Revolution 'the Mahdi's Revolution'.

1.4 The Sacred Violence of the Mahdi and Messiah against the Antichrist and Kufr

A major feature of Islamic eschatology that often surprises Evangelical Christians is the emphasis on the Antichrist - *Al Dajjal Al-Masih* ('the Deceiver-Christ'). There are many and various traditions about him, and we can only examine those pertinent to our theme:

SUNNI	SHIA
Narrated by An-Nawwas ibn Sam'an Sahih Muslim 7015 Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) mentioned of the Dajjal one day in the morning... He (the Dajjal) will be a young man with twisted, cropped hair, and a blind eye... We said: ...how long will he stay on Earth? He said: For forty days, one day like a year, one day like a month, one day like a week, and the rest of the days will be like your days... He will come to the people and invite them (to a wrong religion); they will affirm their faith in him and respond to him. He will then give a command to the sky: there will be rainfall upon the Earth and it will grow crops. Then in the evening, their pasturing animals will come to them with their humps very high, their udders full of milk and their flanks distended. He will then come to another people and invite them. But they will reject him so he will go away from them; they will have a drought and nothing will be left with them in the form of wealth. He will then walk through the desert and say to it: Bring forth your treasures. The treasures will come out and gather before him like a swarm of bees. He will then call someone in the flush of youth, strike him with the sword, cut him into two pieces and (make these pieces lie at the distance which is generally between the archer and his	Khaythama reported that Abu Ja'far said, "...O Khaythama! There will come a time for the people when they will not know who is Allah and His unity until Dajjal appears and Jesus the son of Mary, may peace and blessings be with both of them, descends from the sky, and Allah will kill Dajjal by his hands and a man that is from our House will pray with the people. Do you not know that Jesus will pray behind us, although he is a prophet? Beware that we are better than him." (*Bihar al-anwar*, 24, 328, 46) It is reported that, "Jesus ('a) will descend, wearing two saffron colored robes." According to another tradition, "Jesus the son of Mary will descend to a hill of the Sacred Earth that is named Ithbani [or Ithbayt]. Two yellow dresses are on him and the hair of his head is anointed and there is a lance (arm) in his hand by which he kills Dajjal. He comes to Jerusalem while the people pray the afternoon prayer and Imam is in front of them. Imam comes back, but Jesus prefers him and prays behind him according to the revealed law of Muhammad. Then he will kill the swine, break the crosses, destroy the churches and temples and kill the Christians unless they believe in him." ('*Umdah*, 430) It is reported from Abu 'Abd Allah

SUNNI	SHIA
target. He will then call (that young man) and he will come forward laughing with his face gleaming (with happiness)... at this very time ...Allah will send Christ, son of Mary. He will descend at the white minaret on the eastern side of Damascus, wearing two garments lightly dyed with saffron and placing his hands on the wings of two Angels. When he lowers his head, there will fall beads of perspiration from his head, and when he raises it up, beads like pearls will scatter from it. Every non-believer who smells the odour of his body will die and his breath will reach as far as he is able to see. He will then search for him (Dajjal) until he catches hold of him at the gate of Ludd and kills him... Then the Earth will be told to bring forth its fruit and restore its blessing and, as a result thereof, there will grow (such a big) pomegranate that a group of people will be able to eat it and seek shelter under its skin, a dairy cow will give so much milk that a whole party will be able to drink it. The milking camel will give such (a large quantity of) milk that the whole tribe will be able to drink from it, and the milking-sheep will give so much milk that the whole family will be able to drink from it...	from his fathers that Hasan the son of 'Ali ('a) said when disputing with the king of Byzantium, "The life of Jesus in the world was thirty-three years. Then Allah raised him to heaven and he will descend to the earth in Damascus, and it is he who will kill the Antichrist (Dajjal)." (*Bihâr al-anwar* ,14, 247, 27)

The Antichrist, then, is the culmination of *Kufr* – unbelief. The word is even inscribed on his head![14] He works demonic miracles, and causes people to apostatise (one hadith links this with the Kharijites).[15] In these respects we can see

[14] Narrated by Anas ibn Malik

Sahih Al-Bukhari 9.245

The Prophet ... said, 'No prophet was sent but that he warned his followers against the one-eyed liar (Ad-Dajjal). Beware! He is blind in one eye, and your Lord is not so, and there will be written between his (Ad-Dajjal's) eyes (the word) Kafir (i.e. disbeliever).'

[15] Narrated by AbuBarzah al-Aslami

Mishkat Al-Masabih 3553

Sharik ibn Shihab said, "I wanted to meet one of the Prophet's companions to ask him about the Kharijites. Meeting AbuBarzah al-Aslami along with some of his companions on a festival day, I asked whether he had heard Allah's Messenger ... mentioning the Kharijites.... Allah's Messenger ... said, ..."At the end of time people looking like this man will come forth, reciting the Qur'an, but it will not pass their throats. They will swerve

parallels with the Christian concept. Usually the Hadith indicates that the Dajjal is an individual figure, especially as some traditions suggest an identification with a man called Ibn Sayyad.[16] In every way, therefore, the Antichrist is the opposite of both the Mahdi and Jesus. He performs Satanic counterfeit miracles, purveys Satanic counterfeit religion, provides Satanic counterfeit governance, and a Satanic counterfeit religious Utopia. Aspects of this have led some recent Muslim authors to see the Dajjal as a *system* – such as the New World Order - possibly culminating in a supreme individual.[17] Some basis exists for seeing the Dajjal as a collective figure; there are hadiths predicting the coming of several Dajjals.[18] Others predict his leading multitudes.[19] Further, whilst the Qur'an makes much of 'nations' that are

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from Islam as an arrow passes through the game at which is it shot, and their distinguishing mark will be shaving.

They will continue to come forth till the last of them comes forth with the antichrist. When you meet them they will be the worst of men and beasts."

Nasa'I transmitted it.

[16] Narrated by Jabir ibn Abdullah

Sahih Al-Bukhari 9.453

Muhammad Ibn al-Munkadir narrated that I saw Jabir Ibn Abdullah swearing by Allah that Ibn Sayyad was the Dajjal. I said to Jabir," "How can you swear by Allah?" Jabir said, "I have heard Umar swearing by Allah regarding this matter in the presence of the Prophet ... and the Prophet ... did not disapprove of it."

Narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar

Abu Dawud 4316

Nafi' told that Ibn Umar used to say: I swear by Allah that I do not doubt that Antichrist is Ibn Sayyad.

[17] E.g., Thompson, Ahmed, *Dajjal: The Antichrist,* (London, Ta-Ha, 1997).

[18] Narrated by AbuHurayrah

Sahih Al-Bukhari 9.237

Allah's Messenger ... said, 'The Hour will not be established till: ...about thirty Dajjals (liars) appear, and each one of them will claim that he is Allah's Messenger...

[19] Narrated by Anas ibn Malik

Sahih Muslim 7034

Allah's Apostle ...said: The Dajjal would be followed by seventy thousand Jews of Isfahan...

Narrated by AbuBakr as-Siddiq

Mishkat Al-Masabih 5487

... Allah's Messenger ... told them the Dajjal would come forth from a land in the East called Khurasan, followed by people whose faces resembled shields covered with skin.

Tirmidhi transmitted it.

antagonistic to Islam, it does not mention the Dajjal, but the Hadith equates attacks upon pagan Arabia, Zoroastrian Persia, Christian Rome with an assault on the Dajjal, which may parallel the way the Gospels never use the term 'antichrist' or 'Man of Lawlessness' found in the Epistles, but perhaps equate the concept with that of 'false prophets' *(see below)*.[20] Moreover, some Muslim commentators have claimed the references to the Dajjal being 'one-eyed' and having 'KFR' (infidel) stamped on his forehead are *metaphorical*, and one article noted the following in regard to the US dollar: 'On the U.S. one dollar bill there is a Masonic sign implicating Ad-Dajjal the Anti Christ, A pyramid with one eye... Underneath it is written "Novus Ordum Seclorum" which when ttranslated *[sic]* means: "New Secret Order".'[21] Harun Yaha has taken up a common belief that the Antichrist will claim deity (which resembles 2 Thessalonians 2):

It is revealed in the hadith of our Prophet (saas) that the Dajjal will first claim "**prophethood**" and then "**so-called divinity**" (Allah is truly beyond what they ascribe to Him):

When the Dajjal appears ... everyone will imagine him to be a genuine guide and will flock to his side, and he will continue his work in the same way when he comes to Kufa, and will lay claim to prophethood ... Rational people who see this will depart from him ... Later still, he will lay claim to divine status, and will even say "I am Allah." (16)

He will start by saying that he is a Prophet, but there will be no Prophet after me. Then he will say, "I am your Lord," but you will never see your Lord until you die. (17)

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[20] Narrated by Nafi' ibn Utbah
Sahih Muslim 6930
..Allah's Apostle said: You will attack Arabia and Allah will enable you to conquer it, then you will attack Persia and He will cause you to conquer it. Then you will attack Rome and Allah will enable you to conquer it, then you will attack the Dajjal and Allah will enable you to conquer him.

[21] Yahya, Harun, *AntiChrist Ad-Dajjal*, http://survivorsareus.com/index.cfm/AntiChrist_Ad-Dajjal

... They [the devils] will say to him [the Dajjal], "We are your helpers and under your command." He will then say to them, "Hurry and tell people that I am their Allah..." (18).[22]

It should be noted that Mawdudi, in a statement typical of Islamist thinking on governance, equated claims to political sovereignty apart from implementation of the Shari'ah as shirk – 'association' with Allah, i.e. polytheism – 'Anyone who claims the authority and power, independent of or in rebellion against God, to lay down the code of life for men in fact claims to be a god, and one who ascribes such power and authority to anyone associates him as a partner with God and commits shirk...'[23] Qutb proposed a similar understanding of non-Islamic rule, asserting that to set aside Islamic Law, and rule according to some other ideology is to arrogate to oneself the prerogative of deity:

The principle on which it (i.e. Jahiliyya) is based is opposition to God's rule over the earth and to the major characteristic of the Divinity, namely sovereignty (al-hakimiyya): instead it invests men with this, and makes some of them gods for the others. This transference of sovereignty does not occur in the primitive manner of the pre-hegira jahiliyya, but by allowing man to unduly arrogate to himself the right to establish values, to legislate, to elaborate systems, and to take positions, all without regard to divine ethics...but rather in accordance with what He has expressly forbidden! Now, to oppose the rule of God in this way is to be the enemy of His faithful.[24]

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[22] Yahya, Harun, *The Messiah Dajjal Has Secretly Started Work,* http://www.harunyahya.com/articles/messiah_dajjal.php#notes
The hadith references are as follows:

16. al-Tabarani narrated from b. Mu'tamar, the Companion of the Prophet (saas). 17. Sahih Muslim; Sunan Ibn Majah, 4077. 18. Sahih Muslim, al-fitan, Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Fitan Wa Ashrat 'As-Sa'ah (English translation), Hadith No. 7000.

[23] Mawdudi, Abul A'la, *The Islamic Movement: Dynamics of Values, Power and Change,* edited by Khurram Murad, (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, English version, 1984), p. 86.

[24] Qutb, Sayyid, *In the Shade of the Qur'an,* vol. 30, (London: MWH London Publishers, 1979, 1981 reprint), pp. 44-45.

Therefore, those rulers not obeying God's will in the constitutional and cultural spheres have apostatised from Islam. They are 'false gods' which must be dethroned, and the society purified. Khomeini implicitly stated the same:

...all non-Islamic systems of government are the systems of kufr since the ruler in each case is an instance of tāghūt, and it is our duty to remove from the life of Muslim society all traces of kufr and destroy them... The social environment created by tāghūt and shirk invariably brings about corruption...[25]

It is possible therefore that the 'deity' that the Antichrist is said to claim may be more political than ontological. However, the two are not mutually exclusive. It is on this basis we can view the revolutionary actions of the Mahdi and the Messiah in Islam. The Mahdi comes to establish a true Islamic government and society; at his coming, he faces the crystallisation of anti-Islamic forces in the shape of the Dajjal, individual and system, uniting apostate Muslims with other non-Muslim elements. The hadiths, both Sunni and Shia, present their encounter as necessarily confrontational. In order to establish the ideal Islamic State and society, the Mahdi must fight the power of the Antichrist. It is clear from Shia hadiths that the Mahdi engages in jihad and judgement of God's foes.[26] It is at this point we should note that Shi'ite

[25] Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, p. 23.

[26] *Usul al-Kafi H 1434, Ch. 1c, h 1*

Muhammad Ibn Yahya has narrated from Ahmad Ibn Muhammad from Ali Ibn al-Hakam from Dawud al-'Ijli from Zurara from Humran from abu Ja'far, Who has said the following. "As Allah, the Most Holy the Most High, created the creation... He then made the 'Ulu al-'Azm messengers to testify and covenant to this fact: "I am your Lord, Muhammad is, All is the commander of the believers and his successor, after him are people who possess My authority and are the reservoir of my knowledge. That al-Mahdi, is one whom I make to lend support to my religion. Through him I will establish my kingdom on earth make my enemies to pay for their crimes. Through him I will them to worship me willingly or otherwise."

Usul al-Kafi H 2237, Ch. 94, h 4

Muhammad Ibn Yahya has narrated from Ahmad ibn Muhammad from Ali ibn al-Hakam from 'Abd Allah ibn Bukayr from a man who has said the following:

theology recognises two distinctions in military jihad, with a qualification on the authority to call to military action: 'There are two types of jihad: ibtida'i (to be begun by Muslims) and defa'i (defensive). In the view of Shi'ite jurisprudence, ibteda'i jihad can only take shape under the direction of the Holy Prophet or one of the twelve immaculate and perfect Imams, otherwise it is forbidden.'[27] This is essential to recognise in the present context of concern about Iran's purported 'nuclear ambitions'. Whatever the truth may be, it is irrelevant to Western independence and security, even if Iran amassed a nuclear arsenal twice the size of that of the USA. Iran, as the Islamic Republic, could not employ those weapons to conquer America – until the Mahdi returns and orders such. At best, Iran could only (theologically speaking) employ them if attacked by American nuclear bombs – i.e. in defensive jihad. Only the Twelfth Imam as the Mahdi can give the order for offensive jihad.

Moreover, whether the Dajjal is a system, an individual or both, he (and/or 'it') is not destroyed directly by the Mahdi. Rather, as both Sunni and Shia ahadith testify, this task belongs to the Messiah – Jesus, who slays the Antichrist with a lance.[28] This immediately points to the supernatural

...Abu Ja'far, said, "...Whoever will find himself with our al-Qa'im (al-Mahdi) and will come out with him to do away with our enemies he will have a reward equal to that for twenty martyrs and whoever will be killed supporting our al-Qa'im his reward will be equal to that for fifteen martyrs.'"

Narrated by Imam Baqir

The Mahdi resembles his grandfather Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) in the way in which the latter began his struggle with the sword. He will kill the enemies of God, His Prophet, and those who have oppressed the people and have led them astray. He will gain victory through sword and creating fear [in the enemy]. None of his army will face defeat. *Bihar al-anwar*, Vol 51, p. 218

[27] Mutahhari, Martyr Ayatullah Murtada, *Jurisprudence and Its Principles*, (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, http://www.al-islam.org/jurisprudence/index.htm 2002).

[28] It is reported that the Prophet (ˢ) said, "Among my progeny is the Mahdi. When he emerges, Jesus the son of Mary will descend to help him, then Jesus will send him ahead and pray behind him."

(*Bihār al-anwar*, 14, 349)

Khaythama reported that Abu Ja'far said, "..... Dajjāl appears and Jesus ...descends from the sky, and Allah will kill Dajjāl by his hands..." (*Bihār al-anwar*, 24, 328, 46)

character of the engagement. In Shi'ite narrations, the coming of both the Mahdi and Jesus are miraculous, the former being accompanied by angels and visible in character, the latter, as we have seen, descending from Paradise.[29] The visibility (rather than secrecy) of the events and angelic presence accompanying them underline the supernatural character of the Mahdist/Messianic judgment and jihad, rather than ordinary human actions. Everyone in the world will be able to recognise these events. This being so, it can be seen that speculation about Iranian nuclear ambitions have proceeded without due attention to the character of the coming of the Mahdi and Jesus in Shia eschatology, the fact that the Mahdi alone can order offensive jihad, and the role of Jesus in the destruction of the Antichrist.

2. The Messiah

2.1 Son of David and Confrontational Judgment

In Christian theology, the Second Coming of Christ climaxes the ministry of Christ commenced in His First Coming. The

Ja'far as-Sadiq
Mishkat Al-Masabih 6278
Allah's Messenger ...said, '... How can a people perish of which I am the first, the Mahdi the middle and the Messiah the last?'

The Apostle of Allah said, "How can a community perish when I am at the beginning of it, Jesus the son of Mary will be at the end of it and al-Mahdi will be in the middle of it." (*Dalà'il al-Imàmah*, 234)

[29] *Abul Qasim Ja'far b. Muhammad b. Qawlawayh, may Allah bless him with mercy, reported to me from his father, from Sa'd b. Abdillah, from Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Isa, from Ibn Abi Umayr, from Abdullah b. Maskan, from Bashir al-Kannasi, from Abu Khalid al-Kabuli who said:*

Ali b. al-Husain, peace be upon him, told me: '...I see your master, rising above the hill of your Najaf destined for Kufa, with three hundred and some odd over ten men, Jibraeel on his right, Mikaeel on his left, Israfil ahead of him, and with him (is) the Prophet's standard, unfurled.

They will occupy the east and the west of the world, will bring everything under his command. Each one of these soldiers will have the power of forty strong men. Their hearts will be harder than iron pieces so much so that in their march to the goal should they encounter mountains made of iron they will overcome them with their inner strength. They will continue their struggle until God's pleasure is acquired. (*Bihar al-anwar*, Vol. 52, p. 327).

term Cristov *Christos* is Greek for *'Messiah'*, meaning the 'Anointed One'. In the Old Testament, Kings were anointed with oil, symbolising the supernatural unction of the Spirit of God. In 1 Samuel 24:10 the King is described as 'the Anointed of the LORD'. Thus, a major function of the ministry of Christ is to *rule* as the legitimate Heir of King David – hence the Christological title, 'Son of David', cf. Matthew 22:42. As Christ/Son of David, Jesus brings the Reign of God (Kingdom of God/Heaven) into the sphere of human history. A major aspect of this is *confrontational judgment*. This is *not* effected against *human beings*, but rather against the demonic realm.[30] The classic example is Matthew 12:22ff, where Jesus exorcises a demon, causing onlookers to exclaim the question 'can this be the Son of David?' Jesus later in the discourse (v28) refers to this exorcism as a sign that the Reign of God has entered their midst: 'But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.' This is escalated by Jesus' prediction of His crucifixion in John 12:31, which He presents as 'regime change' - through an assault upon the Devil – the Global Tyrant: 'Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.' Jesus reigns as King from the Cross, John 19:19, so we can say that the Crucifixion is the Messianic overthrow of the power of Satan.

The completion of this activity occurs at the Second Coming. Jesus returns as enthroned King to effect universal judgment – Matthew 25:31ff: 'But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him...' Whilst the wicked are sent to Hell, v46, the righteous receive the kingdom. Divine Justice is thereby enacted in its climactic form. The Second Coming miraculously ends the dominion of evil in the cosmos. The parallels with Islamic eschatology are that as with the ministries of the Mahdi and Jesus, the evil-doers are vanquished, and that a religious

[30] Ephesians 6:12: For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Utopia is established. The major differences, of course, are that no *physical* Sacred Violence is employed, and that the Biblical view concerns the *Final* State, whereas the Islamic presentation involves events immediately prior to this.

2.2 The Antichrist

The Antichrist is explicitly mentioned in the epistles of the Apostle John. In 1 John 2:18 we learn that the antichrist was a *contemporary* phenomenon, rather than one that was yet to come: 'it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour'. It is clear from the subsequent verse that the term refers to a group of schismatic heretics that seceded from the Apostolic churches: 'They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.' The Apostle clearly regards the crux of heresy to be an adoptionist and docetic heresy, as evidenced by his comment in v22 'Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.' The term *Docetism* derives from the Greek word dokein *dokein*, 'to appear, seem'. This denied the genuine corporeal humanity of Christ, in a number of varying forms. For people with these beliefs 'It was inconceivable that the divine Christ could have come "in the flesh" in any ultimately true sense.'[31] Kelly wrote that 'the distinctive thesis which gave it its name ...was that Christ's manhood, and hence His sufferings, were unreal, phantasmal. Clearly its ultimate roots were Græco-Oriental assumptions about divine impassibility and the inherent impurity of matter.'[32]

John fights docetic ideas by describing as 'a deceiver and the antichrist' one who denies that Jesus has come in the flesh, 2 John 7. Perhaps the most notorious Docetist, and certainly one of the earliest, was Cerinthus, a heretic in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century. The Early Church

[31] Chadwick, Henry, *The Early Church,* (London: Penguin, 1967, 1984 edition), pp. 37-38.

[32] Kelly, J. N. D., *Early Christian Doctrines,* (Harper & Row, 2nd Edition, 1960), p. 141.

Father Irenæus in his work *Against Heresies,* details what Cerinthus believed:

I. 26:1. ... the world was not made by the primary God, but by a certain Power far separated from him... He represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation... after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler... But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.[33]

Some scholars have suggested that the first epistle and possibly even the Gospel of John were written to oppose the error of Cerinthus himself, but this is uncertain, and given that in 3 John 9 John shows no compunction about attacking Diotrophes by name, it may be unlikely that he would restrain himself here. We can see what is meant by denying that 'Jesus is the Christ' – not a denial of His Messiahship, as with Judaism, but rather a heterodox assertion that 'Jesus' and 'Christ' were two separate beings, one corporeal, the other wholly phantasmal who merely *endued* the former. The important point for our consideration is that the Apostle labels this docetic heresy as the *Antichrist*. Later, in 1 John 4:1-3, John identifies docetism with 'false prophets' and again the Antichrist, only this time, he states that the emergence of Antichrist had been foretold and expected (v3):

1. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3. and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of

[33] Irenæus, *Against Heresies,* (Wheaton: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000, ANF01CD-ROM)

which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

There is nothing in the Gospel of John which immediately suggests itself as the source of this expectation. Two possibilities arise: firstly, oral tradition from John and/or other apostles, or secondly, a prediction by Jesus Himself. In Matthew 24:24, Jesus does speak of 'false Christs' - qeudocristoi (*pseudochristoi*) – 'pseudo-Christs'. The Greek word *anti* can be translated 'instead of' as well as 'against', but it is unsure that this is the meaning here. However, the same verse links this concept with the simultaneous emergence of 'false prophets' qeudoprofhtai (*pseudoprophētai*). In 1 John 4:1-3 the same phrase *pseudoprophētai* appears, and they are equated with the Docetist Antichrist. In Matthew 24:24, Jesus warns that they will try to mislead 'the elect' i.e. Christians, and then in v25 He states 'Behold, I have told you in advance'. This indicates that Jesus expected them to come in the lifetime of His disciples.

2.3 The Man of Lawlessness

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In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, the Apostle Paul refers to incipient eschatological tragedies: '...the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction'. Traditionally, this figure has been equated with the Antichrist, although the term is never used by Paul. This identification is likely because of parallels with the Synoptic Eschatological Discourse and 1 John. The 'apostasy' is equated with the emergence of the 'Man of Lawlessness', which ties in with Jesus predicting that people would 'fall away', Matthew 24:10. Jesus also seemingly equates 'false prophets' with 'lawlessness' ('anomia *anomia*). We should not understand 'lawlessness' as referring to dysfunctional misconduct, but rather as aberrant theological beliefs. In Matthew 7:22-23 Jesus states that on the Last Day people will be damned who claimed to perform miracles in His name, but were actually guilty of 'lawlessness' (cf. 13:41). This ties in with the 'miraculous' activity of the Man of Lawlessness, 2

Thessalonians 2:9 ('that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders'), and also with his being described as the 'son of destruction' (a term also used of Judas Iscariot, John 17:12), since he was destined for eschatological damnation. In Matthew 23:28 Jesus denounces the Pharisees as being inwardly characterised by 'lawlessness'. The term also appears in Acts 2:23, where it refers to the Jews handing Jesus to the Romans for crucifixion. The Romans, as Gentiles, were 'lawless' – i.e. 'Torah-less'; they did not have the revelation of God. We can understand the force of Jesus' accusation against the Pharisees of being inwardly Torah-less – of turning their backs on God. Paul's usage in his epistle probably suggests therefore the idea of 'heresy' and 'apostasy'. In Matthew 24:11-12, the reference to the emergence of 'false prophets' who will 'mislead many' is followed by an observation of the intensification of 'lawlessness' – indicating that theological issues of heresy and apostasy are concerned. Hence, the Man of Lawlessness is the Heretic-Apostate.

Just as the Antichrist would seem to be a generic rather than individual term, so is this figure. In Paul's time (c. AD 51), the full blown apostasy was still incipient (v7 'For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work...'), but by the time of John's epistle (suggested dates vary from shortly before AD 70 to 80-85), the Man of Lawlessness/Antichrist has been 'revealed' or 'manifested' – 'apokaluptw *apokaluptō* (cf. Luke 17:30). At Paul's time of writing something was 'restraining' the emergence of full-blown Apostasy (v7 'only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way'). The Thessalonians knew its identity, but we do not (v6. 'And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed').

Suggestions include the Roman Empire, the Holy Spirit, or the proclamation of the gospel. Space does not allow for detailed investigation, but the last-mentioned is most likely; in Matthew 24: 13, immediately following the discourse on

apostasy, we are told that the proclamation of the gospel in the 'whole world' (which in context, probably means 'Roman world', cf. the restrictive use in Luke 2:1) is the terminus for the eschatological troubles. It should be noted that Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, and in Romans 15:18 claims to have brought in the Obedience of the Gentiles (cf. also 16:26) through his ministry. Paul goes on to state that he has ministered from Jerusalem to Illyricum, v19, and from what he says in both v19 and v23, it seems that he has now *concluded* his foundational ministry - he has completed the 'circle', kuklov *kuklos*, v19. Since Paul planned to visit Rome *prior*to Spain, 15:24, and *after* he visited Jerusalem, v25, it follows that the 'fulness (plhrwma) of the Gentiles' (11:25), which in the light of the usage of the word in 13:10, referring to the fulfilment of the moral law, *has* come in. In this restricted sense, the gospel had been preached to 'the whole world'. We should then link this with Acts 20:28-30, where Paul warns the Ephesian believers about false, heretical-apostate prophets:

29. 'I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30. and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them...'

'Wolves' is an appellation ascribed to false prophets in Matthew 7:15, and in Revelation 2:1ff, we read that the Ephesus church had to contend with 'false apostles'. It would seem therefore, that the departure of Paul – whether in terms of moving on or death – was the point when heretic-apostates would come to full force. It might be the case, therefore, that Paul himself – in terms of his apostolic mission – was the restraining influence.

2.4 The Destruction of the Man of awlessness/Antichrist

The significance for Muslims of this Christian expectation is that according to the particular brand of prophetic interpretation held by most Christian Zionists, namely Premillennial Dispensationalism, it is essential to build a Third

Jewish Temple, with the implication at least that this will be on the site of the Al-Aqsa complex.[34] This is because, in a rather ironic parallel to the Islamic belief about the Second Coming of Christ, Jesus is held to minister in the new Temple. This is based on a misreading of Ezekiel 47:1ff which ignores the fact that Jesus is presented as the fulfilment of this eschatological expectation in John 7:37-39 which is best rendered thus: 'If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink, the one who believes in me. As the scripture has said, 'Out of His [*i.e. Christ's*] heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Verse 39 equates this with the Spirit. In the aforementioned text and in 4:10, 14, Jesus is the Giver of *the Water of Life*. He is the Temple of which Ezekiel prophesied. This should be compared to John 1:14 - the Word became flesh and dwelt - 'tabernacled' (skhnow *skénoó*) among us, and the verse speaks of 'seeing His glory', another temple category; Jesus also describes Himself as the Temple in 2:19-22 (Paul presents the Church as the Temple in Ephesians 2:20-22). Moreover, a literal reading of Ezekiel 47:1ff would require Jesus to perform sacrifices, whereas a central tenet of New Testament theology is that *Jesus* is the once-for-all ultimate sacrifice (John 19:30; Hebrews 7:27).

The other reason that Dispensationalists await the Third Temple is because they take 2 Thessalonians 2:4 very literally ('who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God'). They expect a personal Antichrist to proclaim himself as divine in the Temple.[35] However, Paul is alluding to Daniel 11, which refers

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[34] Hoyt, Herman A., 'Dispensational Premillenialism', In Clouse, Robert G., *The Meaning of the Millennium,* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1977), p. 83.

Sizer, Stephen, *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon* (Leicester: IVP, 2004): After quoting several authors, Sizer observes that many Christian and Jewish Zionists hold that 'the Muslim Dome of the Rock must be destroyed, the third Jewish temple built...', p. 173.

[35] Sizer, Stephen, *The Rebuilding of the Temple in Christian Zionism,* http://www.christchurch-virginiawater.co.uk/articles/temple.htm#FOOTNOTE Sizer quotes Dispensationalists such as John Walvoord and Hal Lindsey who explicitly assert this.

to the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes (reigned 175-163 BC), who desecrated the Temple, and who according to Daniel's prophecy in vs. 36-37 'will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods... he will magnify himself above them all.' Antiochus regarded himself as Zeus Manifest, and tried to forcibly Hellenise/paganise the Jews. This involved attacking the Torah, which had been state law in Judaea since the decree of Artaxerxes in 458 BC.[36] Hence, Antiochus was 'Torah-less' in a very hostile way. Many Jews went along with him – i.e. apostatised (v32).

The figure in 2 Thessalonians symbolically employs this tradition. The Apostasy arises from within the ranks of the Church, and by turning its back on divine revelation as transmitted by the Apostles, they became 'Torah-less'. In v10 it speaks of such people rejecting 'the truth', with v11-12 stating that God will send them a 'deluding influence so that they will believe what is false' and be judged on that basis. This resembles Romans 1:24-25, where people 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature', and of God 'giving them over' to do so. This strengthens the idea that the Lawless One is a generic representation. Note also that in 1 John 3:4 it states that 'sin is lawlessness'.

The important point for our consideration is the role of 'sacred violence' by Jesus. We find it is identical with eschatological justice – that it is accomplished by the Second Coming. The Man of Lawlessness is destroyed by the Return of Jesus: the Lord will slay him 'with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming', v8. At first glance this presents a parallel with Islamic eschatology – Jesus slaying the Antichrist. However, there are important differences. We do not find any idea of physical Sacred Violence in the New Testament. Jesus rejected physical force against His captors in Gethsemane, Matthew 26:52, noting

[36] Goldingay, John E., *Daniel,* (Dallas: Word, 1991), p. 300.

that He could call on angelic legions if He wished. We also find that Christian Sacred Violence is not directed against human beings, but is of a *spiritual* nature, aimed at the demonic realm, Ephesians 6:12. The text in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 reflects Isaiah 11:4 where it is predicted that the Messianic 'Branch' will 'strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.' This is a general prediction of judgment upon the unrighteous, rather than upon an individual. We have seen that at His Return, Jesus sits as King to dispense Eschatological Justice. In 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, it states that at the Second Coming Jesus will deal out 'retribution' to infidels, v8, who will 'pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power', v9. The similarity of language and theme demonstrate that the 'slaying' is metaphorical and spiritual – in other words, the Torah-less Apostates will be damned in Hell. In New Testament terms, Eschatological Justice is the ultimate Sacred Violence.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen from this paper that there both surprising parallels and important differences between the role of the Mahdi (and Jesus) in Islam, and that of Jesus in the Bible. The Mahdi is an eschatological ruler, and so is Jesus in Christian theology. In both Islamic and Christian theology Jesus destroys the Antichrist, although the nature of Sacred Violence differs. The Mahdi and Jesus (the latter in both Islamic and Christian traditions) engages in Eschatological Judgment of some kind against the unbelieving or rebellious. Of course, the major difference is that in Shi'ite Islam the principal role of Jesus seems to be as the military agent of the Mahdi's rule, and in Sunni Islam He appears to be the Mahdi's successor as ruler, reigning for forty years, whereas in Christian eschatology Jesus is the central figure in governance, sacral violence and eschatological judgment, with no temporal limitation to His position as Messianic King.

The valuable points of this study for the present time are that a proper understanding of the role of the Mahdi in Shi'ism in relation to Offensive Jihad will help allay Western fears about purported Iranian nuclear ambitions, as indeed an accurate understanding of role of the Antichrist regarding the Jerusalem Temple as revealed in the New Testament can assure Muslims that there is no threat from Evangelical Christians to the Al-Aqa holy site based on a proper Biblical exegesis of the relevant texts. In this respect, a more popular knowledge of the doctrines of the Mahdi in Islam and the Second Coming of Jesus in Christianity can aid improved relations between the Western and Islamic civilisations, and even help to prevent war.

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The teachings of Mahdism and its capability for theorizing as a doctrine

Dr Khurshaid Mazharul Haque Nomani

Who is Imam Al Mahdi?

The term "MAHDISM" is a title meaning "The guided one". Mahdi is a normal man who is going to follow the true Islam. Hadrat Abdullah Bin Masood (R.A) says Rasool Allah (p.b.u.h) said," this world will not come to an end until one person from my progeny does not rule over the Arabs and his name will be the same as my name." (TIRMIDHI-1). Hadrat Ali (R.A) narrates that Rasool Allah said," Even if a day remains for Qiyamah to come, yet Allah will surely send a man from my family who will fill this world with such justice and fairness just as it initially was filled with oppression." (Abu Dawood-2).

Among the Prophets of God, the foremost and the last is Hazrat Muhammad (s.a.w.s) who came into being to elevate the minds and to place the mankind in an honoured position. His mission was accomplished to a great extent in his lifetime but the very purpose of his teachings and preachings to place the mankind could not be achieved as desired. The re appearance of our last saviour is motivated with an object to fulfill the unaccomplished mission of the last Prophet of Islam. "The awaited one" would fill the world with justice as it was full of tyranny and oppression, so his noble existence is meant to achieve destined end. It is therefore rightly said:

" It is now evident that Imam (A.S) is root (base) and the world is the tree spread in branches. Imam (A.S) is before all others in time while the world is lost in time. It is a folly to treat it as exaggeration. It is because of him the world is existing and the creatures owe their subsistences to him only. He is the source of subsistences for the destitutes. The sky and the earth also owe their subsistence to him"(3).

The Prophet of Islam, the one described in the Quran, as one that does not speak of his own volition, but only that which is revealed to him has prophesized the existence and the coming of this Saviour (as), (la yantuq 3an alhawa, in howa illa wa7yun you7a)4 said:

"Al-Qaem from my ummah will carry my name and my epithet (kunya), his features will resemble my features, his sunnah will be like my sunnah, he will re-establish the people on my doctrine and Shariah. And he will call them back to the Book of Allah. Whoever obeys him obeys me, and whoever disobeys him disobeys me, and whoever renounces him during his occultation has renounced me, and whoever belies him has belied me, To Allah, I complain about those who belie me in this matter, and refute my words in regards to him, and about those who misguide the people from my ummah away from his path."(5)

The Mahdi is, therefore, the Islamic awaited Messiah. While the people will be pledging their allegience to Imam Mahdi (A.S) a voice from the unknown will come out.

" This is the representative of Allah,
The Mahdi, listen to him and obey him"

The announcement which will be heard by all those present will establish his authenticity. Another sign which will indicate the authenticity of Imam Al Mahdi will be that in the Ramadhan prior to his emergence an eclipse of the sun and moon will occur".(6)

Although considering the universality of the concept of Mahdi, the only religion to give a concrete and practical form to this fundamental belief is the Shiites. In Shiite Islam the Mahdi is not someone that will come at the end of time, nor a dream of salvation that will be realized in the distant future, He is here amongst us, sharing our joys and sorrows.

A professor by the name of Henry Corbin said. "To my mind, the Shiite is the only sect which has preserved and perpetuated the link of Divine guidance between man and God through its belief in the Imamate. According to the Jews, the Prophethood, a real link between man and God, came to an end with Moses. They do not believe in the Prophethood of Jesus and Mohammad. The Christians too, do not go beyond Jesus. The Sunni sect has also stopped at the Prophet Mohammad and belies that the link between man and God has been severed with the end of the Prophethood" (7)

It is only the Imami, ithna Asheri's that have this link to God which will never be severed through, the Awaited Saviour, Imam alHujjat bin alHassan.

Ayatullah Baqir al-Sadr and Ayatullah Murtada Mutahhari, both Shia' Muslim scholars in their book, *The Awaited Savior*, describe the Mahdi this way:

A figure more legendary than that of the Mahdi, the Awaited Saviour, has not been seen in the history of mankind. The threads of the world events have woven many a fine design in human life but the pattern of the Mahdi stands high above every other pattern. He has been the vision of the visionaries in history. He has been the dream of all the dreamers of the world. For the ultimate salvation of mankind he is the Pole Star of hope on which the gaze of humanity is fixed... In this quest for the truth about the Mahdi there is no distinction of any caste, creed, or country. The quest is universal, exactly in the same way as the Mahdi himself is universal. He stands resplendent high above the narrow walls in which humanity is cut up and divided. He belongs to everybody. For all that and much more, what exactly is the Mahdi? Surely that is the big question which the thinking people all over the world would like to ask.(8)

Al-Imam al-Hujjah, peace be Upon him, in another tradition wrote through one of his special deputies during the minor acculation:

"Rest assured that no one has a special relation- ship with Allah. Whoever denies me is not my (follower). The appearance of the Relief (al-faraj) depends solely upon Allah; therefore, those who propose a certain time for it are liars. As to the benefit of my existence in Occultation, it is like the benefit of the sun behind clouds where the eyes do not see. Indeed, my existence is an amnesty for the people of the earth.-Pray much to Allah to hasten the Relief, for therein also lies the release from your sufferings.9

What is Mahdism?

In order to have an understanding of Islamic Mahdism, it is necessary to first accept the fact that there is no Quranic scripture referring directly to the Mahdi himself and therefore the concept emerges from a large number of religious traditions known as Hadiths and Tafseers. Depending on the tradition, the Mahdi will take on different titles and names, and was predicted to come from an array of geographical places. Most of these traditions describe a state of immorality and sinfulness which will exist on earth preceding the appearance of the Mahdi.10 In addition to the spiritual battles that are to face humanity at the "end of time", the Hadiths and Tafsirs also mention earthly trials that are to accompany the Day of Judgment and the appearance of the world's great redeemer, or Mahdi.

For the Sunnites, the Mahdi is known as the Expected Deliverer. Most Sunni theologians agree on three basic principles describing the Mahdi's nature and appearance. First, he is to appear in the world when the planet is filled with injustice and inequity. According to many traditions chaos will reign on earth and it will be filled with anarchy. This state of disarray, according to the reports, is to precede the end of the world. Secondly, the Mahdi is to usher in a Golden Age and through his actions restore order to the planet through the rejuvenation of time honored values and pure religious teachings. The third concept revolves around the accepted notion that the traditions provide more precise conceptualizations of who the Mahdi is specifically. This

relates to things such as where the Mahdi will appear and what he might look like.11

The Shi'as take a somewhat different approach in interpreting the concept of the Mahdi. One striking difference lies in their belief that the Mahdi will be associated with the return of the twelfth Imam. This school of thought believed the rightful successor of the Prophet Muhammad to be Ali, his cousin and son in law. For the Shiites, divine authority passed from Ali, by way of primogenitor, to his sons Hasan and Husayn, the second and third Imam respectively. This line continued through a series of leaders (twelve in number) and, according to certain accounts, the 12th Imam Muhammad al-Hasan al-Askara mysteriously disappeared in his home in the year 878 A.D. It is this figure that is to emerge from the earth at the end of time and bring justice to humankind.12

Besides the return of the 12th Imam, another form in which this great redeemer might manifest himself is that of Al-Qaim. This term is typically used in the connection that the Mahdi will return in the form of the Imam Husayn, considered by pious Shiites as the greatest martyr of their Faith. According to certain traditions, the Qaim will finish the task of ridding the earth of tyranny, starting his quest on the plains of Karbila.13

The concepts of the final times and Mahdism may not be too familiar to many people, so it will be helpful to begin by defining them. According to Islam, the final times will be a period close to the Day of Judgment when the morality of the Qur'an spreads widely and people turn to live by it. People always dream of better things: a prettier view, better things to eat, a better life with no social problems, well-being, peace, plenty, beauty... The final times represents an age that contains all of these "better" concepts. They will be a holy age, when shortages are replaced by plenty and abundance, injustice by justice, immorality by morality, conflict by peace and security, and the Islamic morality that all believers have yearned for down the centuries comes to prevail. The hadiths of our Prophet (saas) contain detailed

descriptions of that time and its salient features. A number of prominent Muslims who came after the Prophet (saas) have also made important statements regarding the final times. When we look at these accounts, we see that the final times will contain a number of important and consecutive events or processes. The final times will be a period when the world first undergoes terrible misfortune and chaos, but later finds salvation by living by the true religion.

In the first stage of the final times, a number of ideologies that deny the existence of Allah will give rise to great world degeneration. People will move away from the purpose behind their creation, and consequently suffer a great spiritual and moral collapse. There will be terrible disasters, wars and suffering, and people will seek an answer to the question "How can we be saved?"

This period of the final times will also be one in which religion is corrupted. Islam will have been diverted from its true form by a number of superstitions incorporated into it. Some people, who cloak their hypocrisy and conservatism under a mask of piety, will try to spread these superstitions even wider and to prevent the understanding of the proper morality that lies at the heart of Islam.

Philosophies that encourage atheism and irreligion on the one hand, and these conservative forces that try to destroy religion from the inside on the other will have pushed mankind in the direction of terrible darkness.

During the terrible chaos of the final times, Allah will use a servant having superior morality known as the Mahdi (the guide to the truth), to invite humanity back to the right path. The Mahdi's first task will be to wage a war of ideas within the Islamic world and to turn those Muslims who have moved away from Islam's true essence back to true belief and morality.

UNIVERSALITY OF THE MAHDISM DOCTRINE

ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR A UNIFIED AND JUST WORLD

Dr. Malika B. Mistry

Abstract

Even though Mahdism is specific to Islam, on a scrutiny of literature of different religions, we find that this concept exists almost among all religions. For example, in Hinduism, the concept of 'Kalyug before the end of the world' exists. In Christianity too, it is firmly believed that Christ is coming back to earth to establish peace and justice on earth. Thus, in this paper, an attempt is made to explain the concept of Mahdism in Islam and its relevance for establishing a unified and just world is analyzed. Also form this context, concept of Mahdism (of course in different forms) in other religions is compared and contrasted.

Introduction

In this paper, a humble attempt is being made to explain the concept of Mahdism in Islam and its relevance to today's world. Later the similar concepts in Hinduism and Christianity are explained. Finally, a comparison and contrast among Islamic concept of Mahdism and similar concepts in other religions, is attempted.

Similarly, this paper is divided into three parts. First part explains Mahdism in Islam and its relevance to today's world. Second part deals with similar concepts in Hinduism and Christianity. In the third part, comparison and contrast among them is undertaken.

I

Mahdism in Islam and Its Relevance to Today's World

Muslims all over the world firmly believe that Hazrat Al-Mahdi (A.S.) will come to earth before Qayamat. He will come to remove falsehood and injustice on earth and establish true religion and truth and justice. A number of Hadees support the above belief.

The book AL-MAHDI (A.S.) BY Ayatullah Sayyed Sadruddin Sadr has, in an elegant way, put together all the relevant

Hadees at one place. To illustrate, please allow me to quote some pages from this book:

"The author of Esa'af-ur-Raghebeeb (on page 148) narrates from Hakim (from the book of Sahih) who narrates from the messenger of Allah (S.A.W.A.) as such:-

'At the end of time, a severe calamity shall overtake my nation ... Allah will send a man from my progeny or he said: from my Ahl-e-bayt who shall fill the earth with equity and justice.

Ibn-Hajar in 'Sawa'eq (page 98) has narrated from Ahmad and Muslim who in turn have narrated from the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.A.) as saying:

'At the end of time, a Caliph will be present who would distribute wealth without any account ...

The author of 'Esaaf-ur-Raghebeen' has narrated the same tradition on page 149 of his afore-said book.

The author says: 'Caliph' in the above tradition refers to Mahdi as per the context of some other traditions.

The author of 'Edud-Durar' narrates from Imam Abu Omar Mada'eni who narrates from Abu Sa'eed Khudri that the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.A.) said: At the end of time a youth with a handsome face and protracted nose shall emerge from my progeny and he shall fill the earth with equity and justice just as it was previously filled with cruelty and tyranny.

The author of Yanabi-ul-Muwadda' (on page 430) narrates from the author of Mashkat-ul-Massbeeh' who narrates from Muslim (from his book "Sahih') and Ahmad (from his book "Musnad') who narrate from Jabir-ibn-Abdullah Ansari that the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.A.) said:

"At the end of time, a Caliph will be present who would distribute wealth without any account'.

Yet another tradition says: At the time of the end of my nation, a Caliph will come who would distribute 'wealth without any reckoning'.

The author of 'Yanabi-ul-Muwadda' narrates from the author of "Fara'ed-ul-Semtain; who narrates from Ali-ibn-Hallal who narrates from his father that the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A.) said: ' Mahdi will come at the end of time and will fill the earth with equity and justice just as it was previously filled with cruelty and oppression.'

The author of "Eqdud-Durar' (in chapter seven)narrates from Hafez Abu Abdullah (from the book of Mustadrak) who narrartes from Abu Sa'eed Khudri that he Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.A.) said:

Mahdi shall emerge with the sword at the time of the end of my nation. Allah shall send rain, the land will cause its own plants to grow, (Mahdi) will bestow wealth in the right manner ... "

(pp.346-349)

If we look around and observe the world, it seems that some of the signs before Mahdi's arrival are perceived. To illustrate:

"To a query on Mahdi, Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A.) replied : At the time when men will imitate the women and women will imitate the men; when women will ride on saddles; when people will cause their prayers to die and will follow their carnal desires; when people will turn usurers; when shedding of blood will become something insignificant; when trade and business of the people will be based on usury; when people will openly commit adultery; when they will make towering constructions; when they will consider lie to be lawful; when they will accept bribes; when they will follow their lust and desire; when they will sell their religion for this world; when they will sever their relations (with others); when they will hold

under obligation the one whom they feed; when they will consider forbearance to be the sign of weakness and feebleness and injustice to be an honour; when their rulers will be evil and their ministers liars; when the trustworthy amongst them will be traitors; when the helpers amongst them will be unjust; when the reciters of Quran will be transgressors'; when cruelty and oppression will become manifest; when divorce will increase; when people will engage in debauchery and libertinism; when they will engage in drinking and gambling; when men will be mounted on; when women shall engage with women (indecent acts); when people will consider 'Zakat' to be a booty and charity to be a loss; when they will fear from the tongues of the wicked people; when Sufyani shall revolt from Syria and Yemen; when 'Baidah' which is between Mecca and Medina will sink; when a child from the progeny of Muhammad (S.A.W.A.) will be killed between 'Rukn' and 'Maqaam', and when a live voice will be heard from the heavens crying out that the truth is with Mahdi and his followers."

(Ibid., pp.333-334)

II

Similar Concepts in Hinduism and Christianity

Hinduism is one of the oldest continuous religious traditions in the world and the predominant religion of India.

The Hindus believe that the 10th Avatar or reincarnation would be Kalki or Kalkin. They believe that the Kalyug has already started and we are living in Kalyug. They are awaiting the descent of Kalki. Kalki is expected to lead India to glory. He will banish sin and injustice on earth and make truth and justice prevail. Because of his efforts and goodness, Indian religion will prevail all over the earth and every community and nation will become subservient to India.

In fact some impostors have claimed to be Kalki. Their claims have been disproved by the rationalists. Recently it has been pointed out by some that Kalki has already taken birth in the Deccan (southern part of India.) But he has not yet

developed the consciousness that he is Kalki. (Oral communication with Prof. Jadhav)

Let me explain the concept of "Great Person Being Awaited" in greater detail:

"Hindus believe that Vishnu, the Preserver, came down to earth in nine Avatars, or incarnations to protect humankind; the tenth incarnation is still to come The popular incarnations of Vishnu are Rama, the hero of the epic story Ramayana and Krishna, the philosopher god of the philosophical work, the Bhagvad-Gita. Despite seeming to have many gods, Hindus worship only one supreme spirit in many forms and under different names." (*World Book*,1992-93:208)

At another place, it is mentioned:

"Vishnu is one of the two main gods of Hinduism. The other is Shiva. Vishnu has a kindly nature, and Hindus call him the Preserver. They believe he tries to ensure the welfare of humanity.

Vishnu sometimes descends from heaven to the earth in one of his avatars (physical forms). He does so when a catastrophe faces the universe or if humanity needs comfort and guidance. According to Hindu belief, Vishnu has already appeared in nine principal Avatar. The two most important one were as the Indian prince Rama and the god Krishna. As Rama, Vishnu was the hero of the Ramayana, a Hindu epic. As Krishna, Vishnu took part in the Bhagvad-Gita, a philosophical dialogue that forms part of the Mahabharata, another epic. *Hindus believe that Vishnu will return to the earth one day to destroy all evil and begin a new Golden Age of humanity.* (Ibid., p.409)

Another reliable source on this concept in Hinduism states as follows:

"The concept of 'Avatara' (literally descent) issues from the belief that in times of trouble a god, notably Vishnu descends and incarnates himself as a man or hero to set matters aright." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*,1977:928)

"The Mantra, name of a diety, .. is said to be the sacrifice of this, the Kalyug (age), the last and most degenerate of the traditional Indian ages of the world. The Vishnu-Purana points out that men, in this age of degradation, are incapable of performing the Vedic sacrifice properly; the gracious diety therefore has given his name as an easier means to salvation." (Ibid., p.926)

"Classical myths develop around the notion of Yuga (world age), of which there are four. These four yugas, Krta, Treta, Dvapara, and Kali – they are called after the four throws, from best to worst, in a dice game – comprise a Mahayuga (large Yuga), and, like the comparable ages of the world depicted by the Greek poet Hesiod, are periods of increasing deterioration. Time itself deteriorates, for the ages are successively shorter. Each Yuga is preceded by an intermediate 'dawn' and 'dusk'. The Krtayuga lasts 4,000 years with a dawn and dusk of 400 years each, or a total of 4,800 years. Treta a total of 3,600 years, Dvapara 2,400 years, and Kali (the current one)), 1200 years, which observes the usual coefficient of 12, derived from 12 month year, the unit of creation. These years are the 'years of the gods' each lasting 360 human years, 360 being the days in a year. Two thousand Mahayugas form one Kalpa (aeon), which is itself but one day in the life of Brahma, whose full life lasts 100 years; the present is the midpoint of his life. Each aeon is followed by an equally long period of abeyance (pralaya), in which the universe is asleep. Seemingly the universe will come to it's definite end at the end of Brahma's life." (Ibid., p.929)

Regarding Avatara, it is elaborated further as follows:

"What little mythology attached to Vishnu consists largely of the mythology of his incarnations (avatara). Though the notion of 'incarnation' is found elsewhere in Hinduism, it is basic to Vaisnavism. The concept is particularly geared to the social role of Visnu; whenever Dharma (universal law and order) is in danger, Visnu departs from his heaven, Vaikuntha, and incarnates himself in an earthly form in order to restore the

good order. In each of these incarnations, there is a particular mythology.

Picture of Different Avatars

The classical number of these incarnations is ten, ascending from theriomorphic (animal form) to fully anthropomorphic (human form) manifestations. These are: Fish (Matsya), Tortoise (Kurma), Boar (Varaha), Man-Lion (Narasimha), Dwarf (Vamana), Rama-with-the-Ax (Parasurama), King Rama, Krsna (Krishna), Buddha and the future incarnation, Kalkin." (Ibid., p.930)

Further, a "cultural hero can easily be assimilated to a god-type by identifying him with an incarnation of god. Thus great religious teachers are considered manifestations of the god of their devotional preaching, and their lives become part of mythology. There is another mythology concerning great ascetics that is very rich. These ascetics are practically gods on earth, who have amassed tremendous powers that they are not loathe to use. The sage, Kapila, meditating in the nether world, burned to ashes 16,000

Princes who had dug their way to him. Another sage Bhagiratha, brought the river Ganges down from heaven to sanctify their ashes, in the process creating an ocean. Agastya, revered as the Brahmin who brought Sanskrit civilization to South India, drank up and digested the ocean. When the Vindhya mountain-range would not stop growing, Agastya scaled it and commanded it to cease growing until his return; he still has not returned. Visvamitra, a king who became a Brahmin, created a new universe with its own galaxies to spite the gods. ....

Moving from myth to legend, there are also stories told of the great teachers, and every founder of a sect is soon deified as an 'incarnation' of a god, the philosopher Sankara (circa 788-820) an incarnation of Siva, the religious leader (Ramanuja) (died AD 1137) as that of Narayana-Visnu, the Bengal teacher Caitanya (1486-1533) as that of Krsna and his beloved Radha at one and the same time." (Ibid., p.931-932)

Now let us move to Christianity. In Bible, two streams of thought follow: one – Christ was a man, he was born, lived and died on the cross. He was a carpenter and started preaching at the age of 30.

The COMING of JESUS and GOD'S GHTEOUS KINGDOM

Thomas Finger

I.) The Future Kingdom of God in the Torah and the Prophets

This hope first appeared in the Torah and the prophets, which both Christians and Muslims accept. It was usually voiced when Israel's leaders were corrupt and unjust, and when wars and fears of war spread through the nations. This hope included six main features.

1.) The Righteous King. According to the prophet Isaiah, "the spirit of the Lord" would rest on him,

"the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord....
with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he will slay wicked." (Isaiah 11: 2, 4; cf. 9:6-7, 32:1-2)

This king was often called the Messiah, which comes from the word for "anoint," since kings were anointed when they began their reign

2.) The Kingdom of Justice and Peace. This King would reign over a world where all people would live together in harmony, and would treat each other justly. At that time "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14; Isaiah 11:9) The earth would yield abundant fruits for everyone.[37]

[37] God "will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth will yield its increase. They shall be secure on their soil, and they shall know that I am the Lord...." (Ezekiel 35:26-27; cf. Isaiah 65:17-25)

3.) The Gathering of God's People. The prophets often declared that Israel that would be conquered and taken captive into many foreign countries for their sins. Yet they added that God would eventually bring their descendants back. The hope for God's Kingdom began to include their return, along with many natives of those foreign lands.

"In the days to come....

Many peoples shall come and say, `Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord....

that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' ....

God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples;

they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall the learn war any more."[38]

4.) The Judgment of the Nations. As the previous passage indicates, the gathering of God's people from all nations would be connected with God's judgment on all nations. This was often portrayed as a great battle, where God would wage some kind of war against disobedient nations.[39]

But would the Messiah fight for God at that time? While some texts in the Hebrew Scriptures picture this, the majority do not.[40] For example, the prophet Isaiah, whom I recently

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[38] Isaiah 2:2-4; cf. Micah 4:1-4; Psalm 46:8-10; Zechariah 2:10-13. Notice also Isaiah 56:6-7:

"to the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord...
These will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar;
For my house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples." (cf. Isaiah 66:18-21)

[39] "Listen, a tumult on the mountains, as of a great multitude!
Listen, an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together!
The Lord of hosts is mustering an army for battle.
They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens,
the Lord and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole earth,
Wail, for the day of the Lord is near;
It will come like destruction from the Almighty!" (Isaiah 13:4-6; cf. 34:1-4; Joel 3:9-15)

[40] The Messiah wages war in Psalms 2:9-11, 21:8-12, 89:23, 110:5-6; Isaiah 9:5 and possibly 1 Samuel 2:9-10. The Messiah does not wage war in Psalms 84:9, 132:10-17;

quoted, prophesied that the Messiah would slay the wicked--but "with the breath of his lips" (Isaiah 2:4). This passage seems to be figurative. However, since the Messiah would be a king, and since kings wage war, most people who embraced the Messianic hope before Jesus came assumed that the Messiah would be a warrior king.

5.) The Outpouring of God's Spirit. God would not only gather the people and establish justice and peace, but would also become more present among them than ever before:

"I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit." (Joel 2:28-29)

Notice that God's Spirit would come not simply to a few leaders, but to all people, including slaves, which implied that social inequality would be overcome.

Other prophets described this coming of God's Spirit as a renewal of peoples' hearts:

"I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them;

I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them."

(Ezekiel 11:19-20, cf. 37:14, Jeremiah 31:31-34)

6.) The Resurrection of the Dead. In earthly life, numerous righteous people suffer while many unrighteous people prosper. If God is just and rewards people according to their deeds, this will have to happen after death. At the End time, then, "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2) At that time, God will "swallow up death forever!" (Isaiah 25:7) The "dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and

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Isaiah 32:1; Jeremiah 23:5, 30:9; Lamentations 4:20; Ezekiel 17:22-23, 34:23-31, 37:22-27; Amos 9:11-12; Micah 4:8; Zechariah 3:10, 4:1-6 and 10-14, 9:9-10.

sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead." (Isaiah 26:19)

II.) The Future Kingdom of God and Jesus

When Jesus appeared, the land of Judah had been ruled by foreign empires for centuries. Hopes for a Messiah who would liberate the Jews from the current oppressor, the Roman Empire, ran high. Several Messianic pretenders had already declared war on the Romans, but had been terribly defeated.

Jesus' main message was: Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand![41] His followers believed that he was the Messiah. But then something very unexpected occurred. Jesus never called his followers and legions of angels to fight the Romans. Instead, the Romans captured Jesus and, Christians believe, they crucified him. People at that time interpreted Jesus' crucifixion as God's judgment on him-- as evidence that his Messianic claims were false, and that those who crucified him were in the right.

But several days later, other unexpected events occurred: Jesus' followers began seeing him and hearing him speak. What could these appearances mean?[42] The way that Jesus' followers interpreted them, and several events that followed, is extremely important for understanding the Christian hope for God's Kingdom. Jesus' followers came to believe that through those later events, the Kingdom of God had *already* come to earth-- *not yet* in a complete, final way, but still in a very important sense. To explain this, let me indicate how those six features anticipated in the Torah and the prophets occurred in these events.

1.) The Resurrection of the Dead. Jesus' followers understood his appearances to mean that the resurrection of the dead, which was expected at the End of history, had already occurred-- yet in a very unexpected fashion. They had expected that all humans would arise at the same time. Yet

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[41] Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:14-15. Scholars agree that the main theme of Jesus' ministry was the Kingdom of God.

[42] Jesus' followers were often surprised or frightened when these appearances began (see Matthew 28:8-10, 17; Mark 16:5, 8; Luke 24:4-5, 11, 36-41; John 20:14-16, 24-28, 21:4-7).

only one person, Jesus, had risen. The rest would not rise until he returned.

To express this, Jesus' early followers called his resurrection "the firstfruits,"[43] and the future resurrection of everyone the full harvest. A harvest begins when the first grapes or ears of grain are ripe. Yet that harvest continues until everything ripens and is harvested. So if Jesus' resurrection is "the firstfruits," his resurrection and the final resurrection are not really two separate events. They are *the beginning and end of one event*: the resurrection which many generations hoped for when God's Kingdom finally came.

2.) The Righteous King. When Jesus was crucified, it seemed that God was judging him for making false claims to be the Messiah. But when God raised Jesus from the dead, his early followers believed, this verdict was reversed. Jesus' resurrection showed that God favored him, and that he was the long awaited righteous King. However, he was a very different kind of King than they expected. He was not a warrior, who killed his enemies, but a Messiah who taught people to love their enemies, and not to resist them violently, even if their enemies wanted to kill them.

3.) The Judgment of the Nations. When Jesus' enemies killed him, it seemed they were in the right and had God's favor. But when Jesus was raised, this verdict also was reversed. Now those who had crucified him were guilty of killing God's Messiah. The Romans and Israel's religious leaders played the main role in this crime, and the crowds who supported this were Jewish. Western Christianity has often blamed the Jews for Jesus' death, and persecuted them horribly. But this is not the true Christian understanding of who killed Jesus.

Christians believe that all people, in all places and times, have sinned, and are under God's judgment. Although some people seem to be better than others on the surface, they all, in the deepest sense, oppose God, and are God's enemies. Christians believe that if they had been in Jerusalem in Jesus'

[43] 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was also called the "firstfruits" (Romans 8:23) as were the earliest converts (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:15, James 1:18, Revelation 14:4).

time, they would have participated in his crucifixion in some way. If you ask a Christian, "Who killed Jesus?" the honest answer would be "I did. Although I was not actually there, I have committed the same kinds of sins as those who killed Jesus."[44] If all people participate in Jesus' death in this way, then everyone, not only the people in Jerusalem at that time, is guilty of his death, and is judged guilty by his resurrection. This is how God's judgment of all nations, expected at history's End, was executed in Jesus' death and resurrection.

This means that Jesus' death cannot be blamed on any one race or people more than on others. It also means that Christians, who claim to be saved through Jesus' death, cannot deserve salvation more than others. People receive this salvation not because they are better than others, but only when they repent and confess that, if anything, they are worse than others. Consequently, Jesus' true Church, or those who receive the benefits of his death, cannot belong to any one, superior nation. If most Americans claim to be Christians, this does not make America closer to God than other peoples. It only makes Americans who call themselves Christians more responsible to live as Jesus taught, and more guilty if they do not.

4.) The Kingdom of Justice and Peace. Jesus was the righteous king, who promoted righteous laws and social behaviors. His teachings were designed to create a new kind of social group. In Jesus' time, rich people were valued much more highly than poor people; similarly, men were valued over women, Jews over Gentiles (non-Jews), and strict religious people over unreligious people. But Jesus' teachings "reversed" these ways of evaluating people..

Jesus sharply criticized wealth and showed special concern for the poor. Jesus valued and welcomed women, Gentiles and unreligious people in remarkable ways. He did not mean that rich and poor social classes should literally exchange places, as in some versions of Marxism. Jesus meant that wealthy people should give up their quest for and

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[44] For an explanation of this which includes the role of social forces, see Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1917), 247-259.

dependence on wealth, so that all people could share the riches of the earth. Similarly, he meant that women and men, Gentiles and Jews, and religious and non-religious people should not change places, but develop fruitful and just relationships with each other. In this way God's Kingdom, expected at the End of history, would become present in some real sense.

To an oppressed people, Jesus' taught an even more remarkable change of attitude. Rather than hating or fighting your enemies, he said, show them love.[45] If a Roman soldier forces you to carry his pack for one mile, voluntarily carry it another mile (Matthew 5:41). Jesus followed his own teaching when he refused to fight the Romans, and as he died, he prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:24)

5.) The Outpouring of God's Spirit. Fifty days after Jesus ascended into heaven his followers were still gathering secretly, because they were afraid of his enemies. But suddenly "a sound like the rush of a violent wind... filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them." (Acts 2:2-3) In this way the outpouring of God's "spirit on all flesh... Even on the male and female slaves," which was expected at history's End, began. (Joel 2:28-29). In this way also, God's Kingdom arrived in some real sense.

The Holy Spirit enabled Jesus' followers to shake off their fears, and gave them the strength to follow his teachings. This was that renewal of people's hearts which the prophets had also foretold.

6.) The Gathering of God's People. When the Holy Spirit first filled Jesus' followers, they were also enabled to tell the good news about Jesus in many languages. On that day, Jews who lived in almost every foreign country were in Jerusalem to celebrate a festival. With them were many "proselytes:" natives of those countries who wanted to join the people of Abraham. When this crowd heard the good news in

[45] See N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), esp. 477-539; cf. 274-319, 446-474, 651-653; cf. Oscar Cullmann, *Jesus and the Revolutionaries* (New York: Harper, 1970).

their own languages, 3,000 of them were baptized and joined Jesus' followers. This was the beginning of a distinct social group called the Church.

Although the good news was first addressed mostly to Jews and proselytes, before long it spread to many other countries where multitudes accepted it. In this way, another event anticipated at the End, the ingathering of God's people from all nations, began to occur, and would continue until Jesus returned. In its first few centuries, the Church spread far to the east of Judea as well as far to the west. From the beginning, the Christian faith aimed to bring justice, peace and harmony to all nations.

These relationships between the Torah's and the prophets' hope for God's future kingdom and the appearance of Jesus are extremely important for understanding the Christian expectation of Jesus' coming. Christians believe that in Jesus' history and the other events just mentioned, that earlier hope was *already* fulfilled in some significant sense, although it was *not yet* fulfilled in a complete sense. The final "harvest" had arrived because the "firstfruits" had already appeared. Yet it would continue until all fruits had ripened and been harvested. This tension between God's Kingdom already being present and not yet being present may sound like a contradiction. Nevertheless, it is central to the biblical understanding of Jesus' coming, for this is a *two-fold* coming.

III.) The Future Kingdom of God in the Western World

In my view, it is partly an accident of history that Christianity became the official state religion of many western nations. As it did, its views changed in some significant ways from the teachings of and about Jesus found in the Bible. I can trace only one change in a very general way: its expectation of the future coming of Jesus and of God's Kingdom.

1.) The Early Christian Hope. Until the 4th century C.E. Christians were a small minority in the Roman Empire. Many of them came from the lower classes or from slavery. Yet the new kind of social group that Jesus talked about was visible among them. For instance, some Roman families left infants whom they didn't want out in the fields to die. Christians often gathered up these infants and raised them. When plagues

struck cities, most people fled. But Christians often stayed behind to minister to the sick, and sometimes died themselves. Christians avoided occupations that involved immorality, and with very few exceptions, service in the Roman armies.[46]

Since Christians believed in a King whose Kingdom was already present in some real way, they refused to worship the Roman gods or the Emperor. Consequently, the Romans persecuted them often, as they had persecuted their Lord. Most Christians expected that Jesus would return to this earth, and that God would punish the Romans when he did. This is expressed most fully in the New Testament book of Revelation, usually in highly symbolic ways which are difficult to interpret.

Revelation portrays God's final destruction of those who oppose him. Jesus also returns, but it is not clear that he is directly involved in this. For example, while Jesus strikes down the nations with a two-edged sword, this sword comes from his mouth.[47] This recalls Isaiah's prophecy: the Messiah "shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he will slay wicked." (Isaiah 11:4) Any such sword or rod must be figurative, and refer to persuasion or preaching.

According to Revelation, Jesus' followers also "conquer" evil, but only in the way their leader had: "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death."[48] Early Christians opposed the Roman Empire only by faithfulness to Jesus and his teaching, and by witnessing, through their way of life, to the reality of his Kingdom

During their first 300 years, most Christians expected Jesus to return to this earth, and for the earth to be transformed into

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[46] See John Driver, *How Christians Made Peace with War* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1988).

[47] Revelation 1:16; 2:12, 17;19:15, 21. Other passages which may possibly refer to Jesus destroying his enemies by force are Revelation 1:7; 2:23, 27; 6:16; 12:5; 14:10; 17:14; 19:11-21; 20:4 and 22:2.

[48] Revelation 12:11. Passages in Revelation which are sometimes said to show Christians harming their enemies are 2:27, 8:4-6, 11:5-6, 19:14 and 20:4. But I find such interpretations very unconvincing.

a just, peaceful, prosperous society of those from every nation, tribe, people and language. These people would live forever. But they would not "go to heaven," or to some realm entirely different from the earth. Instead, the powers of heaven would come down to earth, and transform humans and their environment. Although the nature of this transformation would surpass human understanding, humans would continue to be social, bodily creatures.

Because God's final Kingdom would differ so greatly from earthly societies, and because God would destroy empires like Rome at its coming, the Christian hope sharply critiqued contemporary politics and social life, even though it contained no specific earthly agenda. The Roman authorities found it dangerous, subversive, and a good reason for persecuting Christians.

2.) The Common Western Hope. In 313 C.E. the Roman Emperor Constantine won a major battle and thought that the Christian God had given him the victory.[49] Constantine soon stopped persecution of Christians and made Christianity the favored religion of the Empire.[50] Suddenly Christians ceased being a persecuted minority mostly from the lower classes. Large masses of people, including some wealthy and powerful ones, joined them. For many of these new people, becoming Christian did not involve significant changes in their lifestyles. As time passed, fewer and fewer people who called themselves Christians followed the way of Jesus' Kingdom: the way of sharing, peace and equality with people from other nations, races and social classes.

Most of these Roman "Christians" and their rulers were uncomfortable with the early Christian eschatology, which prophesied the Empire's destruction and a very different society on earth. Gradually, the standard western expectation of Jesus' coming changed in two main ways.

[49] His victory over Maxentius at the Milvian bridge near Rome, which gave Constantine rule over the Roman Empire's western half. On the night before the battle a promise of victory conveyed by Christian symbols appeared to him.

[50] In 381 C.E. the Emperor Theodosius raised Christianity to the official and the only legal religion in the Empire.

First, three of its main features-- the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the nations, and Jesus' coming-- came to be understood individualistically and were relocated from the future earth to heaven. The rising of the dead into God's presence was shifted from one future historical moment to the countless moments when individuals died. Each one would encounter God when one's body ceased to function and one's soul rose up into heaven.

The final judgment was also transferred from God's single, future dealing with all nations to the multiple moments when departed souls were assigned to heaven or hell.[51] Concern for the destiny of the human race was replaced by individual anxiety about entering heaven or hell. Hope for the righteous King's coming changed into awaiting Jesus as a judge, often with fear. Jesus would no longer transform the world, but would finally save, or damn, souls.

The other three features of early Christian hope-- the Kingdom of righteousness, the gathering of God's people, and the outpouring of God's Spirit-- were still interpreted socially and historically, but in a very different way. Jesus the righteous King, who had been relocated in heaven, was also assigned a new role in this history.

Around 400 C.E. the great Christian writer Augustine of Hippo acknowledged that the biblical hope included the destruction of all empires, including Rome. But, Augustine added, this was valid only as long as the Roman Empire was persecuting the Christian Church. Beginning with Constantine, however, the Roman Emperors, with very few exceptions, favored and promoted the Church.[52]

One biblical name for God's future Kingdom of righteousness is the "millennium," which means a period of 1,000 years. Revelation 20:4-6 pictures Jesus reigning on earth with his saints during such a period (though it may not

[51] Eventually a third possibility emerged: individuals who were Christians, but still committed many sins, were assigned to "Purgatory:" an experience of being cleansed or purged from their sins. Only afterwards would they finally enter heaven. This experience of purgation, however, was often pictured as fiery torment, not much better than Hell.

[52] St. Augustine, *The City of God* (Middelsex, United Kingdom: Penguin, 1984) Book 20, Chapter 6:3-29.

mean a literal 1,000 years). Augustine argued that since Christian Emperors now rule society, aided by the Church, the millennium was no longer future, but had already begun. The rule of the Roman Empire and the Roman Church was in fact the reign of Jesus the righteous king through his saints during the earthly millennium. The heavenly Jesus was, in effect, disengaged from human history. Though his earthly coming was occasionally mentioned, it was postponed to the millennium's end-- far too distant to affect the present society.

God's Kingdom of justice and peace, then, was not really future, but present in the Roman Empire, aided by the Church. The Romans prided themselves in spreading peace, justice and civilization through the world. To be sure, Roman engineering, architecture and law contributed lasting benefits to civilization. But for most conquered peoples, this came at the price of brutal warfare and oppression.

While Augustine's eschatology gained favor in the western, or Roman, Church, it and the Eastern, or Byzantine, Church drew further and further apart until they separated in 1054 C.E. This is western Christendom's eschatology, for it had little impact on the Eastern churches.

In the west, the gathering of God's people became identified with missionary work within the Roman Empire and in European lands beyond it. These efforts were distant from Eastern Church missions, except for a few countries where the two competed. As Islam arose, this western "millennial" Christianity became increasingly hostile to it, and could attack it as God's direct enemy, as in the Crusades. Western Christianity aligned itself more and more with European civilization, and often sought to defend it against other nations, and even to destroy others, instead of extending the good news of Jesus and his Kingdom of justice and peace to everyone.

Finally, God's Spirit was no longer poured out on the whole world, but mostly on the Roman Church, enabling its leaders to define doctrine, perform sacraments, and govern through Church law.

3.) From the Protestant Reformation to the Present. During the 16th century C.E. many European political

territories, from city-states to entire nations, rejected Roman Catholicism when their leaders established new Protestant Churches. The unity of western Christendom was fragmented by wars among Protestants and Catholics for at least a century. But by the 18th century the common western hope reappeared in a more secularized from. Western nations now considered themselves superior to others due to their advances in science and technology, and their "enlightened" social outlook, which promoted freedom and democracy.

"Progressive" thinkers believed that these new scientific and political procedures could bring prosperity and justice to the world very quickly and initiate, in effect, a millennium.[53] This vision inspired a western "mission." As they conquered or took control over much of the globe, westerners supposed, like the old Roman Empire, that they were bringing other countries the benefits of their advanced civilization. But for most conquered peoples, as for subjects of the Roman Empire, these came at the heavy price of brutal warfare and oppression. Some Christian missionaries, remembering the early Christian hope of Jesus' peaceful Kingdom, opposed these evils. But too many other missionaries were guided by the common western hope instead of this Biblical vision.

In North America the common western hope reappeared much earlier than in Europe. No symbol inspired its rise to power more than "the Kingdom of God.[54] Many early settlers believed that God had called them to build that Kingdom anew on their unexplored continent. This task drew successive generations 3,000 miles from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific, almost annihilating the Native Americans in the process. Then it expanded into the Enlightenment mission of bringing science, education, and democracy to the rest of the world.

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[53] "If at this juncture we can rally sufficient religious faith and moral strength to snap the bonds of evil and turn the present unparalleled economic and intellectual resources of humanity to the development of a true social life, the generations yet unborn will mark this as the great day of the Lord for which the ages waited...." (Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* [New York: Harper and Row, 1964], 422).

[54] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in American* (New York: Harper and Row, 1937).

This secularized millennial mission is still rooted deeply in the American psyche. The present government invokes its symbolism very often. It leads countless Americans to consider the tremendous cost of their involvements overseas--in human lives, environmental damage and billions of dollars--necessary, and therefore justified, for completing this mission. Many American Christians seem to be blind to these horrible consequences, because they view this "mission" as God's.

To nations which feel its heavy impact, however, it looks much more like the violent expansion of self-interested power and wealth. I am deeply grieved by the incalculable suffering this "mission" inflicts on Iraquis, Palestinians, Lebanese and many others. As an American, I also fear that it is making my country not safer from, but much more vulnerable to, attack--on my children, my grandchildren, my friends, and millions of Americans who oppose it. I notice many parallels between my governments' efforts and those of the Roman Empire to dominate the world. While I would not identify America with any eschatological figure,[55] Christian eschatology warns that nations who follow this path will overreach themselves, arouse widespread hatred, and eventually bring on their own destruction.

IV.) The Reappearance of the Early Christian Hope

Hope for the earthly coming of Jesus and his Kingdom never died in the West. It flared up often among people who felt heavily oppressed by their churches and governments, and could hardly regard them as rulers of the millennium. Many of these people, as in the early church, hailed from the lower classes.

Some of these millennial movements took up arms to further their cause. So far as I know, nearly all of them were viciously persecuted and defeated. Other movements which were not mainly religious, but political and/or nationalistic, described themselves in eschatological terms and took up arms. Some

[55] Such as the Anti-Christ (1 John 2:18, 22, 4:3, 2 John 7), the beast with seven horns and ten heads (Revelation 13:1-8), etc.

of these overthrew governments, but afterwards they often portrayed their own rule in millennial imagery.

Still other movements anticipated the full, earthly coming of God's Kingdom, which was *not yet* present, but like the early Christians they *already* lived by its teachings, such as non-violence, equality and sharing. Their lifestyle differed so greatly from European societies that it sharply critiqued them, as early Christianity had critiqued Roman society. Governments felt threatened, and often persecuted them as the Romans had persecuted early Christians, even though neither movement had a political agenda. Despite this, these groups inspired some social reforms. But can this early Christian hope offer any realistic guidance for today's world, which is torn by many conflicts and threatened with global destruction?

Consider how the Soviet empire collapsed. One would suppose that so oppressive and scientifically sophisticated a system could be toppled only by bloody wars or revolutions. Yet most communist governments capitulated with hardly a shot being fired. When enormous numbers of citizens staged protest marches, work stoppages and simply refused to co-operate, they collapsed. Other oppressive regimes, like El Salvador's, finally succumbed to courageous but non-violent opposition of large citizen groups. Quite recently, massive demonstrations brought down the Kingdom of Nepal.

I do not think that non-violent approaches will always succeed. Yet it is obvious that war, which is far more damaging and expensive, often does not work. Still, Christians who use only peaceful means do so not simply because these might succeed, but because Jesus teaches them. In closing, let me indicate several convictions central to his approach to conflict and war..

One conviction is that revenge, or punishing an enemy for harming oneself or one's group, will never bring widespread, lasting peace. To be sure, when governments inflict punishments which are equivalent to the crimes committed,[56]

[56] The Torah's formula for this is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21).

these can promote justice and stability. But people who desire revenge often inflict far greater damage on their enemies. This enflames their enemies' desire for excessive retaliation, and initiates an escalating cycle of wrongs avenged by greater wrongs, sometimes continuing for centuries. Enemies, Jesus teaches, will not attain lasting peace until they stop seeking revenge-- unless they stop returning evil for evil, even when it seems justified, and bless those who persecute them (Romans 12:14-21). For this to happen, at least three things are necessary.

First, enemies must search for creative, non-violent ways to resolve their grievances and problems. When Jesus told people oppressed by Rome to carry a soldier's pack an extra mile, he was not advising passive suffering, but creative, loving response. When people are hit on one cheek and turn the other cheek, they do something unexpected. This can unsettle aggressors and stop the cycle of violence before it starts. Jesus said, in effect: when you are wronged, and your immediate impulse is to strike back... Stop! The Kingdom of God is at hand! There must be a better way to overcome evil. Search for it!

Second, people must often accept the pain of being wronged and injured, and forgive their enemies instead. Christians believe that Jesus did this when he refused to defend himself against his killers, but prayed for them. Christians believe that this kind of response does not end in defeat, but unleashes the power that raised Jesus from the dead. This power will begin to overcome injustice and violence *already*, in this life, and will finally raise everyone who has been wronged unjustly and establish God's righteous kingdom forever.[57]

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[57] In western Christianity, however, wealthy and powerful people have often told those who serve them to routinely accept wrongs, and expect a reward in heaven. Jesus did not have this kind of passive suffering, which justifies oppression, in mind. Though his way can lead to suffering, it is the way of active, creative love, which opposes oppression. Suffering is not good in itself, but only when it expresses God's forgiving, renewing love.

Movements of Messianic expectation in Christian history from a sociological perspective"

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When social science scholars meet to review movements of messianic expectation within Islamic and Christian history (and also beyond these religious traditions), the connections between faith and practice (belief and behavior) are of particular interest. For sociologists of religion and for cultural anthropologists, the linkage between religious ideas and social patterns is an important topic of inquiry.

Throughout the last century, many scholars of sociology have operated with a secular framework, not necessarily adhering to religious beliefs themselves and not very concerned with the content of those beliefs. But the founders of their discipline, in contrast, did take particular interest in questions of the impact of religious beliefs on everyday behavior in social contexts.

Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and even Karl Marx were all compelled to pay attention to religious communities as part of their wider theoretical formulations about society.

Whether they agreed with the beliefs of the groups they observed or not, the founders of modern sociology showed an awareness that links between religious ideas and social patterns could be strong. Many different sectors of society connect back to certain shared understandings and beliefs, often rooted in religious convictions tied to a world beyond our human empirical grasp. These may include questions of political power in the organization of society, and questions of popular morality that shape its legal framework, and the very

practical questions of content in the educational curriculum of public schools for a civil order.[58]

One area of social inquiry which tends to attract both religious and secular scholars alike is the sociology of minority or dissenting movements within a larger religious and cultural heritage. Sociologists are fascinated with the origins of new religious movements, with splits and splinter groups that branch off from established religious traditions. Set in contrast with the larger patterns, these groups serve to highlight and distinguish some key dynamics in the linkages between beliefs and practices. Whereas the majority or dominant consensus, in any given society, tends to take such links very much for granted, dissenting groups by their very existence raise questions about claims that have long escaped scrutiny. Among these minority groups, differences in beliefs often lead to readily observable differences in social or political patterns.

New religious movements sometimes emerge in the context of disputes or conflicts over the past or the present. But one set of special interest for this conference are the groups that emerge with differing views of the future. Movements that form around messianic expectations have long intrigued social scientists. These movements tend to suspend "business as usual," clarifying stark choices with a heightened sense of "what really matters." In their most pronounced versions, groups that form with high expectations of divine intervention and deliverance often develop alternative patterns with regard to work, property and family arrangements.

I. Early American history of messianic movements: 1830s

Classic studies in this field include Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District*,[59] which examined the origins of

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[58] The cultural anthropologists, of course, have always seen these patterns as closely intertwined. Although this paper focuses on sociological approaches, I note that anthropologists are usually more confident about making assertions to tie beliefs and social practices together, while sociologists have generally been less explicit about these linkages.

[59] Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1950; reprinted by Harper & Row, 1965).

numerous new religious movements in the western part of the U.S. state of New York during the first half of the nineteenth century (1800-1850). Two hundred years ago, settlers of European origin were rapidly pushing westward from the older communities of New England. The new nation was largely populated by Protestant Christian groups, and this westward expansion into new territories meant that many persons were no longer connected to any particular local congregation. Revival movements gathered many into new congregations of the standard branches (including Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists). Their traveling preachers worked like missionaries, holding meetings in the open air or under tents. This activity was common all across the frontier regions, further south and further west from New York state.

But Cross found that this small region, just one part of one state (rural, upper New York),[60] quickly became a concentrated center for many kinds of religious activity. The numbers of religious leaders, religious organizations, missionaries, religious publications and many other indicators of religious activity were disproportionately large in relation to other areas of the new country in the first half of the time period he studied. Almost all of this religious activity would have been considered intense but conventional at the time. It was not heterodox; it did not have theological innovation or deviation in practices. It was the standard Christian faith of its time, but clearly displaying elevated stages of intensified enthusiasm and commitment.

About 1825, however, new variations began to arise. This would be just the first of several new groups that consciously went beyond the boundaries of standard Christian faith. A marginal group known as the "Shakers" had significant influence in the region, and was well-known to its friends and its opponents alike. Although founded not long before in England, its real growth and rise to public influence began largely in the state of New York, again in its upper and rural regions. Under "Mother Ann Lee," this group introduced

[60] It is important to distinguish this part of New York state from the much better-known New York City, very large and rather remote, lying well south of the region described here.

innovations such as shared property (proto-communism), refusal to use weapons (nonresistance to violence, or pacifism), and full equality for women with men, both in religious and ordinary life activities. The group's gatherings for worship included an active expectation that the Spirit of God would prompt spontaneous and unpredictable actions among the worshippers, and that mystical powers of healing would be manifest.[61]

Because Shakerism included substantial theological innovation and heterodoxy, Cross viewed it as "a kind of ultimate among enthusiastic movements" in the first half of the nineteenth century, showing how its "communism, pre-millennialism, spiritualism, and perfectionism could from existing Shaker communities infect larger movements."[62] While the previous developments had been mostly of a conventional or orthodox character within standard branches of the Christian Protestant faith, marked only by increased fervor or intensity, the Shaker alternative was only the first of many later groups that would form with more and more divergence from the classic, orthodox traditions.

The New Yorkers being studied here became recognized for their intense beliefs, their willingness to consider alternative proposals, and their general cultural optimism, according to Cross. One political issue which had broad social implications was the campaign against Freemasonry, which largely arose from rural suspicion against powerful secret societies of the more urban and privileged classes.[63] In 1826, a disgruntled former Mason named William Morgan who had begun to reveal the secrets of the secret society caused a great stir across a wide region. While he was being held in prison, a band of unknown raiders captured him from the prison and he disappeared, probably being murdered for his disloyalty to the Masons. The Whigs, a new political party at that time,

[61] Cross, pp. 30-31. Shakers are not significantly related to the better known groups called Quakers.

[62] These terms and the movements they inspired are examined in a following section of this paper.

[63] Cross, pp. 114-117. Persons who follow contemporary popular culture will recognize the suspicions about Freemasonry from similar controversies surrounding the recent book and film, "The Da Vinci Code."

embraced the cause and gained considerable strength through agitation against the Masons. Meetings and publications patterned on prior religious models served to translate the energy of this suspicion into the wider political arena. Cross sees this issue as likely "the most comprehensive single force to strike the 'infected district' during an entire generation."[64] Some religious leaders had also been members of the Masonic order, and some were not. But a far higher percentage (about 25%) of local religious leaders than ordinary religious members (about 5%) belonged to the Masons, at the outset of the controversies. Many religious leaders were disgraced in public and forced to withdraw from the Masonic membership.

At this point the stage was set for more wealthy landowners (now doubly unpopular due to class resentments and also to their Masonic ties) to abandon their former positions of influence and support for religious groups, while control of these church organizations passed to the less wealthy but more fervently religious citizens. As Cross puts it, "people of reasonably substantial property interests—and perhaps by the same token of reasonably good judgment—thus seem to have been driven from sympathy with churchly concerns by the fanaticism of Antimasonry. Their less prosperous fellows moved into command of the meeting and would henceforth freely underwrite religion pleasing to their own tastes and of a sort which might increase membership quickly, to relieve their own increased financial burdens, without the balancing influence of more conservative minds." Closing the Masonic lodges had made churches more powerful.[65]

The religious organizations followed on this success with further campaigns to distribute large amounts of religious literature, especially Bibles, and to organize religious education (Sunday Schools). A campaign to discourage or ban the consumption of alcohol (the "temperance movement") also gained much momentum in these same circles. Another cause was the movement to prevent economic and certain social

[64] Ibid., p. 120.
[65] Ibid., pp. 124-125.

activities on Sunday, as the Christian holy day reserved for worship. In each case, the organizational successes of moral and religious movements continued to grow and flourish, and they flourished much more intensely in this part of New York state than elsewhere. And all of the participants would clearly have seen their activities as significantly related to the hope of Christ's return, part of the historical drama that would lead to God's reign or rule on earth.

Ultraism: For the record, it is worth noting that the now-famous Mormon movement (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) began in this district of up-state New York also. And so did the Millerites, also known as Seventh-Day Adventists. What ties these and numerous smaller groups together, apart from the proximity of their geographical origins, according to Cross, is the pattern of religious enthusiasm he designates as "ultraism," which swept the region during the 1830s. Many traveling preachers organized speaking campaigns with "protracted meetings" that stirred the local population into a religious frenzy. Drawing the attention of a crowd, and holding the audience over a lengthy period of time, depended on bringing out more and more emotionally charged teachings. Concerns over sin (both personal and social) were emphasized; individuals gave testimonies of great struggles over a heightened sense of fear, doubt and despair.

Cross traces the next part of the drama as religious excitement during the previous years began to turn toward political campaigns in the 1830s. Certain parts of the religious establishment resisted the changes, but large numbers of ordinary church members began to resonate with the concerns against the institution of slavery. Though there were not many slaves being held for commercial exploitation in the northern states, and the problem was therefore not to be solved locally, the cause gained adherents rapidly in New York's religious strongholds. Cross records evidence that this antislavery movement gathered more support among rural residents than among city-dwellers; he also shows that it gained ground more rapidly among some Protestant groups than among other similar Protestants (Presbyterians more than Methodists, for example).

There is a strong parallel in the growth of two distinct political campaigns in this region and in the same period: abolition of slavery and abolition of alcoholic beverages ran together as the largest and most obvious political agitations, which also translated into support for newly emerging political parties. Votes for these causes mapped across the region in the very same areas that had also produced religious revivalism, Anti-masonry, Adventism, perfectionism and spiritualism, in addition to other "minor ultraisms," as Cross describes them.

Each of these causes or movements shows the tendency to identify a clear threat or evil, denounce it as sin, and then engage in strenuous efforts to organize themselves and like-minded adherents into committed companies of persons who will act together in the marketplace, together in their places of worship, and together in their political participation to accomplish the changes which they favor. Whether in the name of religious revival, or of moral reform of society, the idea of combining forces to stamp out something evil from society was a powerful unifying force. To oppose the works of Satan and to hasten the coming of God's reign, major efforts were invested and great campaigns organized, at considerable expense. People sacrificed their time, their talent and their financial resources to advance their chosen cause.

The whole pattern of ultraism, writes Cross, reached its peak by the year 1836, and then abruptly diminished for the following six years, due largely to an economic depression. An epidemic of the cholera disease swept through the upper New York region at this time also. Many of their new organizations failed and went bankrupt or were sold.

By the 1840s, however, the stage was set for a new, very powerful revival of religious fervor and expectations. The rise of William Miller's new Adventist preaching, which originated slightly to the East, in old New England, took the Burned-Over District by storm. Even though economic depression continued, Miller's prediction of an actual date to expect the return of Jesus Christ (somewhere between March 1843 and March 1844) began to stir large numbers of the population into renewed religious excitement. But the announced date for the

end of all things came and went, and was postponed or re-scheduled several more times (most conspicuously, October 22, 1844), before the excitement faded in deep disappointment. People who had left everything to wait for the coming of the Lord had to return to other ordinary pursuits; some joined other nearby movements but kept a lower profile. This very public humiliation for the persons who predicted and then retreated from their fervent hopes to see the return of the Lord became a source of humor and mockery by many others around them. The failure of predictions required a target of blame; this process eventually focused on the inadequate devotion of the followers themselves.

One might expect that this public humiliation and failure would result in permanent discrediting of prophecy-based movements in the wider American society. And in some aspects, this indeed is the primary conclusion for the stories that swirled around upstate New York in the first half of the 19th century. Religious fervor and radical hopes for social transformation shifted away from the sphere of religion, moving instead into political campaigns over various issues that appeared to have less and less connection to the religiously-based movements that preceded them. American political society became more and more preoccupied with the campaign to abolish slavery, which brought out deep conflicts between northern and southern states. This led quite rapidly to the Civil War (1861-65), which in turn was reflected in the north/south division of all of the leading religious bodies (Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, etc.).

It is evident, therefore, that the later conflicts which wracked the still-young American society in the 19th century became largely political and economic, though with religious overtones and serious consequences among religious bodies. The Civil War disputes were not primarily religious, however, and did not originate within religious controversies as such. Even if combatants in the civil strife were deeply religious and expressed their views accordingly, it was not primarily religious concerns that tore them apart. What was most perplexing for sincere Christians at the time, in fact, was the recognition that God and the Christian faith were understood

on both sides in largely the same ways. I have provided these descriptions from the religious movements in U.S. history from the 1830s as a background for some further comments on current developments and movements that have an impact on a much wider scale.

II.Current Definitions for understanding prophecy-based movements

Interest in prophecy/predictions and speculation about the End-times has not in fact disappeared from general American culture, even though some examples from history have been discredited or disappointed. Shifting our focus to the present situation among the U.S. population, we find that even those who do not count themselves active Christians or church participants are often paying attention to popular teachers or preachers who base their explanations of current events on a framework that draws from the Bible's teachings.

It may be helpful at this juncture in the presentation to review just how the key terms are best understood in popular American usage today. Some of these concepts are no doubt familiar to many of the participants in our Consultation gathering in Tehran, since they appear in news headlines and stories with considerable frequency. But the nuances and distinctions among terms may be lost in popular coverage, so we will try to unpack some of the terms with care.

What do such terms as *utopian*, *adventist*, *millennialist* and *apocalyptic* really mean, with regard to the history of Christian movements (and as used within current American cultural discourse)? It is important for understanding some of today's significant social and political developments in the U.S. scene and even around the world to trace as accurately as possible the deep ways in which popular culture has been shaped by key concepts in the more narrowly religious history reviewed in the first part of this paper. To draw the connections between the formative chapter of religious enthusiasm in the first half of the 19th century through to today's religious movements that have substantial influence on public life in the United States, we should attempt some clarifying distinctions here, among the rich variety of messianic groups.

Utopian: ever since the classic book by Sir Thomas More (*Utopia*, 1516), this term is used to characterize an ideal, perfect society. More placed it on an imaginary island, and today it is often used pejoratively, in a sense of impractical or unreal experimentation. Although it may be easily dismissed today, after many such experiments have been attempted and failed, the impulse of cultural confidence and optimism about perfecting human society keeps re-appearing in numerous guises. Few such efforts turn out to be explicitly based on a religious vision today, but the social and cultural history that Americans too easily forget has included such examples of utopian community as John Humphrey Noyes, who in 1840 began a communal group in Vermont that soon moved to Oneida, upstate New York. Sharing their property and their other resources, this group became entangled in controversy over its unorthodox sexual arrangements, a problem that would recur in scores or even hundreds of similar groups during the following decades. Noyes claimed to model his communism on the practices of the earliest Christian churches in Jerusalem. His group was a religion of perfectionism, believing that humans could achieve endless spiritual growth and real holiness or purity. It is worth noting that as an economic enterprise, the Oneida community survived right into the present, although its religiously based organization disbanded in 1881.

Overall, utopian views and experiments have remained very much a minority phenomenon, among the larger patterns of messianic expectation we are studying here, but these views are a recurring theme or impulse within many community idealists. Even if most persons would not share the cultural optimism that utopians believed, many Americans today are prone to the idea that complex problems are liable to a "quick fix."

Apocalyptic: the broadest term to cover the concepts and movements that are organized around anticipation of Christ's return signifies an intense interest in the things that are expected to happen at the end of human history. Apocalyptic teaching is meant to reveal what those future events might look like, and how to recognize the signs of their approach.

Will the judgment of God be revealed against all kinds of wickedness and sinfulness in our broken world? Can we read the occurrences of natural catastrophes as part of that picture? Will violence and human depravity reach new levels, as things get worse and worse before God intervenes on a massive scale to start putting things back in right relationships? Will the sufferings of God's righteous followers in this age be compensated by rewards and relief from suffering in the age to come?

These are the hopes and the soul-felt longings that have produced such curiosity and eager expectation in every chapter of human recorded history as we attempt to relate to God. The literature of these longings is rich, and the visions have sometimes been very detailed. Without attempting to document or evaluate these visions, a sociological account will nevertheless take note that the ideas have certainly displayed significant power to gather up persons who are suffering, who are weary of the tribulations of this world, and who have valid theological reasons to expect something better ahead, in the providence of God.

But authentic apocalyptic literature usually is formulated in hard times, when its intended audience is often under repression and when saying clearly what the oppressed are hoping for could get the author and the audience in trouble from the oppressors. Those were the conditions which the people of ancient Israel were living in during exile, when the first examples of apocalyptic literature in the Bible were written. And the conditions were similar when the early Christians were under oppression in the Roman Empire and the apostle John was in prison, receiving the revelation which became the final book in the New Testament, "The Apocalypse" revealed to John.

One prominent aspect of apocalyptic literature, then, is that its truths are often revealed in a way that is clear only to those who really understand the message. For an outsider, the truths would be more obscure, deliberately disguised so that the writer and the audience would not get into trouble with the oppressing authorities. Poetic expressions and metaphors both reveal and conceal the intended message. Encoded

messages are common, requiring the reader to decipher the meaning. Beyond the immediate context of the original message, many references that would be clear or obvious to the first recipients become obscure to later readers. When John's Revelation at the end of the Christian New Testament refers to the "Beast" that exercises authority and makes war on the saints (Revelation 13), the first audience would most likely have connected this to the Roman Empire, a government that was persecuting the early Christians in the first century of the church. But the metaphor allows many other suggestions throughout history also, whenever earthly powers are persecuting the righteous ones who put their faith in God.

Apocalyptic visions of the world are often expressed in sharply dualistic terms, as forces of evil opposing forces of good. Neutrality or non-alignment is not valued, in these visions. Compromise is not a virtue, in this approach to life's difficulties. Reaching agreements with political forces at a different point along the spectrum is not a prized skill. Believers who are strongly shaped in this vision are most concerned to be faithful, whatever the price may be. These powerful beliefs can inspire great devotion and loyalty, among believers who are prepared to undergo great suffering and persecution. This devotion is the basis for many strong movements throughout Christian history.

Eschatology: The Christian teachings that build around the hopes for the Messiah's return belong to the category of *Christian eschatology*, the doctrine of last things. The *eschaton*, a Greek term, is the end of human history, in this account. It relates to questions of what happens to humans after death, how God's judgment will appear, and what will be the destiny of persons or forces that are arrayed either for or against God's will in human affairs. The hope for God's righteous judgment has often provided powerful motivation for believers who pour their best efforts into putting things right in the world of human social concerns.

The movement to end human slavery was a lengthy struggle, owing its eventual victory in large measure to the hopes and expectations of many Christian believers who

found in their faith a powerful resource for opposing the evil of that large human institution.[66] Many other campaigns for social and economic and political improvement in the centuries since the abolition of slavery have continued to draw inspiration and strategies from that example, especially the campaigns for civil rights in the United States, and other human rights campaigns around the world. For many social reformers, their efforts belong to the hope of putting things right in ways that fit more closely with God's justice and God's intended designs for human societies. And thus, even in an indirect way, these efforts at their best reflect some of that eschatological hope.

Adventist and **Millennialist**: Two further terms must be noted, before this paper concludes with a glimpse of current groups that advocate some similar beliefs. *Adventist* and *millennialist* beliefs are inherently related, with the latter term designating different branches within the larger stream of adventist thinking. Despite the fact that one rather large minority group near the edges of the Protestant churches is today known as "Adventist" (Seventh-Day Adventist Churches, to be precise), the Christian belief that Jesus Christ will return to this earth in power and glory is a staple of classic Christian teaching in almost all branches of the Christian churches. It is not only a group named "Adventist" that shares this belief. But what makes "Adventists" unique, then? Is it anything more than an arbitrary selective emphasis on their part, just as Baptists emphasize baptism but most Christians are also baptized?

From an outsider's perspective, or in strictly sociological observations, one might easily be honestly confused by this range of curious diversity in emphases. For the purposes of this paper, let it be enough to take at face value the stated belief that certain Christians have a pronounced view and devotion to the hope of Christ's return. One would look for evidence that their lives and relationships are organized around this belief in some coherent patterns. Presumably it would affect the way they plan for the future, making such

[66] Again, this campaign culminated in fact in the U.S. Civil War, 1861-65.

plans contingent on whether indeed the Lord's return is expected to be quite soon.

What becomes even more interesting, from a sociological perspective as I am proposing in this review, is when differences emerge among those who hold the general expectation of Christ's return in common, but begin to go in different directions in their interpretations of what will happen just before or even just after that anticipated event. *Millennialist* views pick up at this point, and they come in three main versions. The term itself names the expectation (gleaned from Revelation chapter 20, in the Christian Bible), that Christ will return to earth, defeat Satan and establish a kingdom to rule on the earth that will last 1000 years (a "millennium," from the Latin root for 1000, "mille"). Simply put, the *pre*-millennialists expect events to unfold in this sequence: Christ returns, and then comes 1000 years of peace and righteous rule. The *a*-millennialists consider that the millennium began long ago with Christ's resurrection and continues until the end of time. The *post*-millennialists expect the whole world to come to faith in Christ and be transformed into a golden age of peace, and after this millennium then Christ will return.

Among these branches within a general millennialist framework, it is the **premillennialists** who are regarded as most apocalyptic in generating lurid, intense scenarios of predictions for the end times. These usually include the expectation of persecutions for Christians, natural catastrophes, violence, destruction and especially war. Simple warnings and minor references in widely scattered parts of the Bible (in both the Hebrew Torah and the Christian Gospel) are woven together into a complex scheme of interpretation that produces predictions of signs that must happen before the final climax and the end of history at the return of Christ.

Dispensationalism: The single most widespread and influential of these interpretive systems is known as "*dispensationalism.*" It originated in Britain (1830s) with John Nelson Darby, an Anglican priest who quickly moved into dissident reforming circles, but its influence only grew when transplanted into the fertile imaginative soil of the Americas in the 1870s, soon after the period of religious fervor and the

Civil War as described earlier in this paper. Dispensationalism's primary concept is that human history unfolds in different chapters, or dispensations, which God provides with somewhat different rules or arrangements.

The details need not concern us here, but the intrigue of the entire system depends largely on its ability to describe, interpret and explain current or future events of human history. This naturally means a fascination with biblical prophecies and predictions that appear to be convincingly drawn from biblical teachings. This movement found adherents among most of the conservative Protestant evangelical groups in the intervening century, rising to prominence in the early 20th-century disputes between modernists and fundamentalists that shook almost every branch of the Protestant movement in America.

III. Impact of Current Messianic Movements in the U.S.

Why do these ideas and disputes from previous centuries matter to anyone today, in a sociological inquiry? What difference might minor theological debates among conservative Christians make in any other part of the world? The answer may be surprising, both to someone who essentially grew up surrounded by such phenomena and to another who has only observed it from a great distance.

Even though all the beliefs depicted to this point in the paper may seem equally strange and obscure to an outside observer, this last group of dispensationalist millennialists among Christians turns out to be the least unusual in their behaviors of any of the groups mentioned along the way leading up (or down?) to their appearance on the stage of religious history. As Timothy Weber, whose doctorate was awarded by the University of Chicago, points out in a critical study of this movement, dispensationalists did not engage in bizarre practices such as religious communism, distinctive food diets, unconventional sexual practices or family arrangements, nor any deliberate departures from classic Christian teaching. Their activities were neither spectacular nor especially scandalous in terms of public morality. Taking the Bible quite literally, and studying it carefully, their beliefs may have been regarded by other Christians as fantastic or sensationalist, but hardly dangerous.

As Weber puts it, the dispensationalists "were history's great spectators and explainers: They had the 'sure word of Bible prophecy' to help them interpret world events and show how such events were leading to Christ's return. As futurist premillennialists, they believed that they would be raptured [*miraculously removed from the scene*] before most end-times events actually took place, but they expected to be here long enough to see history moving decisively in a predetermined direction."[67] Weber continues by describing dispensationalists as spectators who sit watching a game of football, commenting on the players on the field below them and explaining to everyone around them just how the game is going to end.

I would also depict this movement like a group arranging the pieces of a complicated puzzle made up of very tiny components. Each part must be placed in just the right position for the entire picture to eventually make sense. Weber shows that the movement achieved considerable success with interpreting world events through the First World War, at the beginning of the 20th century. Rather than organizing to reform society, however, the dispensationalists poured most of their energy into simply trying to convince and convert people to accept the Gospel and become active Christians. This was their answer to the apparent decline in social conditions; they understood that their time was short, before the anticipated end.

The movement did not have much social or political impact before the Second World War, nor did it address any particular causes or controversies in the wider society. Its chief ambition was to recruit and convince more persons to become Christians who shared their basic beliefs and who would watch the game of history together, as in Weber's analogy. They did not intend to become players on the field; they mostly wanted to observe the game. In times of great uncertainty and social or political insecurity, their simple message offered substantial comfort and clarity.

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[67] Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 15.

The dispensationalists were building a popular movement and gaining adherents amid rapid social change. Their leaders became powerful communicators, using the means and methods of mass communication more and more effectively. They taught a vision of God as powerful and ready to intervene in human history. Even when human history seemed to be getting worse and worse, the bad news only made their Good News shine more brightly. The expectation that Christ is returning soon did not lead to spectacular or bizarre behaviors as in some previous movements, but rather they used this hope to cultivate basically sober and careful lives, devoted to the things that believers would want to be doing in the moment when Christ would appear. They did not feel a need to control or even influence the course of human history; God would take care of all of that.

This focus on the personal or even private dimensions of faith corresponded well with the emotional requirements of a society tending toward individualism, although undergoing massive social changes. There was too much complexity in the wider world for ordinary believers to feel responsible for it all. Large-scale forces seemed to be out of control, and beyond the impact of religious communities. The events leading up to the Second World War did not quite make the same kind of sense according to the prophetic schemes they were working with.

It turned out that one of the biggest pieces in the puzzle was still missing. For more than one hundred years, this movement had been interpreting biblical prophecies to indicate a renewed role for the nation of Israel before the final rounds of human history could take place. For certain anticipated events, certain key players on the field (to use Weber's analogy again) had to be Jews in order for the proper relationship to the Messiah to be accomplished. According to this interpretation, which was central for the entire drama, the nation of Israel would once again reject the Messiah and judgment would be rendered, and then some remaining Jews would embrace Jesus as Messiah after all. These steps in the sequence could not be fulfilled by secular Jewish actors or persons who remained far away from Jerusalem. The same literal approach to other

passages of the Bible required literal fulfillments of these references, as interpreted by the dispensationalists.

The centrality of Israel for the last chapters of human history, in the drama as seen by the dispensationalists, required a significant change in their relation to the game after 1948, when that event appeared to be confirmed with the establishment of Israel as a nation on territories still disputed today. I will not try to evaluate or debate that event within the framework of this paper, but the role of Israel must be noted as very important (not precisely for Jews or for Arabs or other neighbors in the Middle East) but as a piece of the prophetic puzzles so intensely studied by the dispensationalists. This event in fact is the precipitating cause for a shift in the role that dispensationalists assign to themselves: they are seriously tempted to move out of the stands as observers and onto the field of the game themselves as players. After World War II, they begin to see themselves as at least partly responsible to help history come out right. They began to consider that the fulfillment of prophecies might require active participation on their part. No longer content to merely observe and explain historical events, they began trying to influence those major forces by advocacy, lobbying, praying and paying support for the causes that they deemed to be directly in line with prophesied events.

Not all Christians in the United States are Protestants; not all Protestants are evangelicals; and not all evangelicals are dispensationalists. This paper is not meant to exaggerate their impact on the American social and political scene today. But about one third of evangelical Christians in the U.S. are dispensationalists (which is about 15 million out of 40-50 million evangelicals). Polls also report that only about one third of all Americans (36%) believe that the Bible is to be taken literally as God's Word, but almost two thirds (59%) think that predictions from its book of Revelation will come true. [68] If an observer tries to understand the Religious Right on the American political scene, or the popularity of the religious best-seller fiction series of "Left Behind" books, or the stream

[68] Weber, pp. 9, 11.

of tourists and dollars from the U.S. supporting conservative causes in Israel in recent decades, the chances are pretty strong that dispensationalist teaching and organizations are behind these diverse phenomena. Most political observers would also credit this set of voters with determining the outcome of at least the last two presidential elections in the U.S.

Strange as it may seem to distant or secular observers, there is more adequate explanation for this set of social and political behaviors in the real world to be found by referencing the religious beliefs of dispensationalist Christian theology than in the complex machinations of global capitalism or the conspiracy theories about secret societies, I believe. Very serious critique can be and is being directed at this movement from within alternate frameworks of Christian theology, but this paper has concentrated on tracing the patterns that connect belief and behavior in a fairly wide range of movements within recent Christian history. Because these movements almost all have in common the fervent expectation of Christ's return.

VORTRAG ZUM IMAM MAHDI

Doris Tarabolsi

Sind wir uns darüber einig, dass die die Existenz des Imam Mahdi (a.), sein Leben in Verborgenheit und sein Erscheinen an einem von Gott bestimmten Tage am Ende der Zeit, real ist?

Viele Vertreter der westlichen Gesellschaftssysteme, die in unterschiedlichen Stufen von so genannter Demokratie, vermeintlicher Gerechtigkeit bis hin zu Ungerechtigkeit, Tyrannei und Unterdrückung der sowohl eigenen Völker als auch fremder existieren und ihre Informationssysteme möchten gerne das Erscheinen des Imam Mahdi (a.) in eine negative Endzeit, in ein Apokalypse-Szenario, setzen. Sie erheben eine Meinungsmache- und Manipulationsmaschinerie. Und einige unter ihnen beschwören diese oder meinen, es würde ein solches Szenario inszeniert, damit der Mahdi erscheine. Entweder sind diese unwissend oder auch wohl wissend in ihrem Sinne und fürchten um ihre Macht und ihren Profit, ihre Bestrebungen, die Schätze der Erde, die von Gott erschaffen und allen Geschöpfen gehören, der Gemeinschaft der Menschheit, unter wenigen aufzuteilen bzw. diese anderen wegzunehmen, anderen die Entwicklungen und Technologien vorenthalten zu können und ihnen ihren Willen aufzuzwingen.

Es ist meiner Meinung nach ein Teil der Wahrheit, dass die Erde und die Menschheit vor einer Apokalypse stehen, aber nur in einem Teil der Menschheit, die das Üble und Teuflische verkörpert. Der andere Teil, der das Gute und Göttliche verkörpert, wird sich in dem Maße verstärken, wie auch der üble Teil zunimmt. Im Ausmaße dessen, wie die Menschen an Wissen, Erkenntnis, Vervollkommnung wachsen, werden sie das Üble, Falsche, Schlechte wahrhaftig erkennen. Das Üble wird kämpfen, um den unvermeidlichen Niedergang seiner Macht auf Erden aufzuhalten, und das Gute wird sich erheben

für die Gerechtigkeit und am Ende den Sieg davon tragen mit Gottes Hilfe.

Die Gerechtigkeit wird sich gegen die Ungerechtigkeit erheben, die Zeichen des Erscheinens des Imam Mahdi (a.) werden davon künden, Zeichen, die in den Überlieferungen beschrieben, einige von ihnen deren Bedeutung offenkundig ist und einige unter ihnen, deren innere Bedeutung zu jener Zeit erkannt werden wird.

Dann, wann die Zeit reif ist, die Menschen bzw. ein bestimmter Teil von ihnen zur Erkenntnis auf Grund von Wissen und einer höheren Vollkommenheitsstufe gelangt sein werden, wird der Imam Mahdi (a.) für alle sichtbar aus seiner Verborgenheit hervortreten, wann die Menschen bereit sind, seiner Führung wahrhaftig zu folgen, dann wird er der Gerechtigkeit den Gesetzen Gottes entsprechend zum Siege verhelfen.

Dementsprechend wurde von mir die Herangehensweise über die Gerechtigkeit gewählt und ich möchte meine Sicht untermauern anhand von Beweisen aus Qur'an und Ahadith, so diese mir zugänglich sind, und mit dem was hochrangige Gelehrte des Islams berichten.

Ebenso bleibt festzustellen, dass der Glaube des Menschen unabhängig von seiner Herkunft und Religion an eine Art von Messias, Erlöser, überall auf Erden anzutreffen ist und auf eine Art existentiell ist. Des Menschen Hoffnung, Erlösung, Glückseligkeit im irdischen Leben zu erlangen, ist ihm wesenseigen. Diese liegt in seinem Streben und Tun. Hier setzt wieder die göttliche Erschaffung der Geschöpfe und des Menschen im Besonderen an, von Gott der erschuf, ohne dass der Mensch wusste, Er, der ihn (den Menschen) nach seinem Bilde, seiner Vorstellung, erschuf und ihm die Vernunft gab, damit er gut und böse unterscheiden möge und den Willen, von dem er Gebrauch machen möge, seine Wahl für den Weg des Lebens zu wählen und entsprechend zu handeln.

Gott liebt seine Schöpfung. Gott ist das Gute und will das Gute, und Er ist barmherzig mit seiner Schöpfung. So ist belegt, dass Er, sollte der Erde nur ein einziger Tag bis zum Tage des Jüngsten Gerichts verbleiben, Er diesen verlängern wird um soviel, dass Gerechtigkeit auf der Welt einzieht und herrscht und der Mensch im Diesseits Glückseligkeit erlebt, die göttlich gewollte Glückseligkeit in ihrer wahren Schönheit. Ein Geschmack davon erhält der Mensch, in dem er auf dem Weg der göttlichen Rechtleitung wandelt und durch gute Handlungen auf Grund guter Gedanken glückselige Momente Tag für Tag erleben kann und diese ihn anspornen, an sich zu arbeiten, an seiner menschlichen Vervollkommnung und Annäherung zu Gott, zur Glückseligkeit sowohl im Diesseits als auch zu der im Jenseits. Da wir Menschen uns in einem Entwicklungsprozess befinden und einem jeden von uns Fehler unterlaufen können, da wir ja auch nicht fehlerlos sind, sollten wir Acht geben auf unseren Erkenntnisweg, unsere Gedanken und die daraus resultierenden Handlungen, wenn wir falsches feststellen, innehalten und uns verbessern auf dem rechten Weg durch Erkennen, Wissen suchen und erlangen und unsere Handlungen und Taten entsprechend ändern.

Zunächst möchte ich auf die Bedeutung des Imam, wie ihn die schiitische Lehre versteht, eingehen. Der Imam stellt sich vor die Gemeinschaft und ist ihr Führer. Er gibt die gesellschaftliche Richtung, die politische Gesinnung, die wissenschaftlichen und religiösen Ziele vor und steht dabei immer in Beziehung zur Basis, zu den Menschen und für den Menschen. Er zeigt ihnen ihren Handlungsspielraum und ihre Grenzen auf und durchdringt alle Bereiche des menschlichen Lebens und erteilt Anordnungen und Regeln hierfür gemäß den göttlichen Gesetzen. Dementsprechend untersucht und leitet der Imam das Leben aus geistiger Sicht, ergreift die Herrschaft aus gesellschaftlicher Sicht und führt die Gemeinschaft. Wenn nun diese drei Sichtweisen in der islamischen Gemeinschaft vorhanden sind, wird die Organisation dessen sich in islamischer Herrschaft, Erläuterung der Wissensgebiete und Urteile des Islam sowie

der Führung und Instruktion des geistigen Lebens im religiösen Imamat manifestieren. Das Imamat, dessen Organisation und Führerschaft sind von Gott und seinem Gesandten bestimmt, denn der Prophet handelt auf Gottes Befehl. Die Person des Imam schützt und wahrt die himmlische Religion und ist von Gott für dieses Amt bestimmt, der Imam ist unfehlbar und immun. Der Imam ist Führer bezüglich der äußeren wie inneren Handlungen der Menschen, er führt sie zu Menschlichkeit auf dem Weg des Inneren unterwegs zu Gott.

Der Prophet und die Imame stehen an erster bzw. höchster Stelle in Vollkommenheit im religiösen Leben. Sie rufen auf zur Hinleitung zur Vollkommenheit der Handlungen ihrer selbst, wie diese gemäß Gottes Wille sein sollten, und verfügen über die geistige Lebenskraft dafür. Darüber hinaus sind sie die Tugendhaftesten und führen das Volk auf Gottes Geheiß im physischen und im geistigen Leben, so dass die Menschen die Wahrheiten ihrer Handlungen unter ihrer Führung erfahren. Die Wahrhaftigkeit und das Licht des inneren Wesens des Imam beeindrucken und beeinflussen die würdigen Herzen der Leute, um sie auf höhere Stufen der Vollkommenheit zu bringen.

Im Qur'an heisst es dazu beispielsweise in Sura al-Anbiya (21), Vers 73:

„Und wir machten sie zu Vorbildern (Anführern), die nach Unserem Befehl leiteten. Und wir gaben ihnen ein, gute Werke zu tun, das Gebet zu verrichten und die Abgabe zu entrichten. Und sie pflegten Uns zu dienen."

Oder auch in Sura As-Sajda (32), Vers 24:

„Und Wir bestellten unter ihnen Vorbilder (Anführer), die (sie) nach Unserem Befehl leiteten, als sie sich standhaft gezeigt hatten und von unseren Zeichen überzeugt waren."

Im Yanabi' al-Mawadda, S. 308 wird berichtet, dass Salman al Farsi sagte:

„Ich trat beim Propheten (s.) ein und sah, wie Husain auf seinen Knien saß; er liebkoste seinen Mund und seine Augen und sprach dabei: ‚Du bist ein edler Herr (Sayyid), Sohn eines edlen Herrn, du bist ein Imam, Sohn eines Imams, Du bist ein Hujja (Beweis), Sohn eines Hujja, Du bist der Vater von neun Hujja, dessen neunter al Qa'im, der sich Erhebende, ist.'"

Die Bedeutung des 12. Imam wird deutlich durch die ihm verliehenen Namen:

- Al Mahdi – der Rechtgeleitete
- Al-Muntazar – der Erwartete
- Hujjat Allah – der Beweis Gottes
- Imam al-Asr – Imam des Zeitalters
- As-sahib az-Zaman – Herr der Zeiten
- Al-Qaim – der sich Erhebende, der Gerechte
- Sahib-as-Saif - Statthalter des Schwerts (Dhu'l fiqar)
- al-Qa´im bi al-Haqq - der mit der Wahrheit Aufstehende,
- Hujjat ibn-al-Hasan - beweiskräftiger Sohn Hasans (Sohn des 11. Imam)

Sein Leben war von Anbeginn an in Gefahr, im Prinzip schon vor seiner Geburt, da Qur'an wie Sunna von den 12 Imamen und der besonderen Bedeutung und Aufgabe des Imam Mahdi berichten und daraus schlussfolgernd auch seine Widersacher darüber Bescheid wissen. So wurde auch seines Vatershaus unter Beobachtung gestellt, und sein Vater, der 11. Imam, Hasan al-Askari, lebte bis zu seinem Märtyrertod unter Drangsal, Unterdrückung, Beobachtung, die meiste Zeit seines Lebens unter Hausarrest. Die Geburt des Imam Mahdi vollzog sich im Geheimen, ebenso wie seine Erziehung, die dem Vater oblag, bis zu dessem Tod, als der Imam Mahdi ca. 5 Jahre alt war. Mit dem Ableben seines Vaters wurde dessen Sohn zum Imam ernannt. Der erste Teil seines verborgenen Wirkens wird al-ghaiba als sughra, die kleine Verborgenheit,

genannt und währte ca. 70 Jahre. Während dieser Zeit trat der Imam über spezielle Stellvertreter (Na'ib) mit seiner Ummah in Verbindung. Vor seinem Verlassen des irdischen Lebens erließ er ein Dekret über seinen letzten Stellvertreter Ali ibn Muhammad Simmari, dass von nun an die Tür der speziellen Stellvertretung geschlossen sein werde und die nun folgende Verborgenheit, die große, al ghaiba al-kubra, (seit 329 n. H./939 n. Chr.) bis zu seinem Wiedererscheinen auf Gottes Geheiß andauern werde. (Bihar al-Anwar, Bd. 51, S. 360/361; Al-Ghaiba von Tusi, S. 242)

Überlieferungen zufolge führt der Imam Mahdi (a.) u. a. das Dhu'l-fiqar und die Bundeslade bei seiner Wiederkehr mit sich. Dhu'l-Fiqar, das Schwert Alis, dass dieser vom Propheten zum Geschenk erhielt, besitzt eine Doppelscheide, dessen Trennscheide die Grenze zwischen Wahrheit und Falschheit darstellt und ist somit Symbol für die Gerechtigkeit seines Urteils. Es wird auch als „Säule der Schwerter" bezeichnet. Seine Rückkehr ist gekoppelt an die ebenfalls erwartete Rückkehr Jesu (a.). Die Mitführung der als verschollen geltenden Bundeslade und die Rückkehr Jesu ist zu sehen als Vereinigung der vollkommenen Menschen unter der vollendeten Religion Gottes, dem Islam, dem Ergebensein in Gott. Die Bundeslade nimmt Bezug auf die Schrift des Alten Testaments und soll die Steintafeln mit den zehn Geboten, die Moses (a.) von Gott erhielt, enthalten und bezieht sich auf das Judentum. Die Rückkehr Jesu steht im Bezug zum Christentum.

Gott verkündet im Qur'an in Sura al-Muminun (23), Vers 52:

„Gewiss, dies ist eure Gemeinschaft, eine einzige Gemeinschaft, und Ich bin euer Herr, so fürchtet mich!"

Das Erscheinen des Imam Mahdi wird sowohl aus allgemeiner als auch spezieller Sicht erwartet. Allgemein leitet sich dies ab aus der Wirkung von Gottes Gesetz der universellen Wegleitung in allen Arten der Schöpfung. Manche Menschen besaßen die Kraft der Prophetie bzw.

Offenbarungen zu empfangen, diese weisen den Menschen den Weg zu seiner Vollkommenheit und Glückseligkeit in seinem gesellschaftlichen diesseitigen Leben. Dies belegen alle heiligen Schriften, deren abschließende der Qur'an ist, der Mohammad, dem Gesandten Gottes und Siegel der Propheten, offenbart wurde.

Jeder Mensch lebt mit der Hoffnung auf ein soziales Leben und Glückseligkeit, diese Hoffnung ist ihm vorgegeben und ist Grund für sein Dasein und die Fortführung seines Lebens, die sich eines Tages erfüllen wird. Wäre dieser Wunsch nur äußerlich und nicht ihm innewohnend, wäre auch die Hoffnung nicht existent, im gleichen Maße wie es den Hunger gibt, weil Nahrung existiert und benötigt wird, wie Durst erst durch das Vorhandensein oder die Abwesenheit von Wasser empfunden wird, und ebenso sexuelles Verlangen dem Menschen innewohnt, weil es seiner Fortpflanzung und seinem Lebenserhaltungstrieb dient. Deshalb wird es eines Tages eine Zeit geben, in der die Erde von Gerechtigkeit, Frieden, Freundlichkeit, Vollkommenheit und Tugendhaftigkeit erfüllt sein wird.

Es ist beispielsweise überliefert, dass Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud sagte, dass der Prophet (s.) sprach:

'Auch wenn der Welt nur noch ein Tag bliebe, würde Gott diesen verlängern, bis Er einen Mann aus meiner Gemeinde (Al-Ummah) und meinem Haus (Ahl-bayt) geschickt hat, dessen Name meinem gleicht, der die Erde mit Billigkeit und Gerechtigkeit erfüllt, so wie sie im Augenblick mit Unterdrückung und Tyrannei übersät ist.'" (Fusul al-Muhimma, s. 271)

Die Schaffung eines solchen Zustandes liegt in der Hand des Menschen, sie müssen sich entsprechend entwickeln, dass sie reif sind für ihren Imam, ihren Führer, ihm aufrichtig und wahrhaftig zu folgen, damit sie erlöst werden und der Mahdi der Erlöser und Führer einer Welt mit menschlichem Antlitz sein wird. Jede Religion, ob Judentum, Christentum,

Zoroastrismus, Islam spricht von einem Erlöser und verkündet frohe Botschaft über sein Erscheinen.

Aus spezieller Sicht des Erscheinens des Imam Mahdi gibt es viele Beweise in Qur'an und Ahadith des Propheten und der Imame, dass er erscheint, aus dem Geschlecht des Propheten stammt und mit seinem Erscheinen die Gemeinschaft der Menschen zur wirklichen Vollkommenheit führt und ihnen ein gesegnetes Leben schenkt und der Mahdi ein unmittelbarer Sohn des 11. Imam, Hasan Al-Askari, ist. Die Ahadith berichten von seinem Erscheinen nach einer langen Abwesenheit und der Erfüllung der Welt mit Gerechtigkeit und dem Ende von Ungerechtigkeit und Tyrannei.

Beispiele hierfür sind:

Abu Jafar, der fünfte Imam, sagte: „Wenn sich unser Gerechter (Al-Qa'im) erhebt, wird Gott Seine Hand über die Köpfe der Gläubigen halten. Danach wird sich durch ihn ihre Vernunft vereinigen und ihre Geduld vollenden." (Bihar al-Anwar, Bd. 52, S. 328 und 336)

Abu Abd Allah, der sechste Imam, sagte: "Das Wissen (al-Ilm) besteht aus 27 Buchstaben; alles Wissen, was uns darüber vom Propheten erreicht hat, besteht aus zwei Buh staben. Niemand weiß bis heute mehr als diese zwei Buchstaben. Wenn sich dann unser Gerechter erhebt, wird er 25 Buchstaben hervorholen, sie unter die Leute verbreiten und die zwei Buchstaben hinzufügen, bis 27 Buchstaben verbreitet sind." (Bihar al-Anwar, Bd. 52, S. 336)

Als der Prophet (s.) einmal gefragt wurde nach dem Erscheinen des Gerechten aus seinem Geschlecht, antwortete er mit dem Vers 187 der Sura Al-A'raf:

„Sie fragen dich nach der Stunde, für wann sie feststeht. Sag: Das Wissen darüber ist nur bei meinem Herrn. Nur Er wird sie zu ihrer Zeit erscheinen lassen. Schwer lastet sie in den Himmeln und auf der Erde. Sie wird nur plötzlich über euch kommen. Sie fragen dich, als ob du gut unterrichtet über

sie seiest. Sag: Das Wissen darüber ist nur bei Allah. Aber die meisten Menschen wissen nicht."

Musa ibn Jafar al Baghadai hörte Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Ali, den 11. Imam, sagen: *„Ich sehe Euch nach mir über meinen Nachfolger streiten. Wer solcherart die Imame nach dem Propheten Gottes bestätigt, jedoch meinen Sohn bestreitet, gleicht dem, der sämtliche Propheten Gottes und Seine Gesandten bestätigt, aber dann das Prophetentum von Muhammad, dem Gesandten Gottes, bestreitet; und wer den Gesandten Gottes bestreitet, gleicht dem, der sämtliche Propheten abstreitet; denn wer dem letzten von uns gehorcht, gleicht dem, der dem ersten gehorcht, und wer den letzten von uns bestreitet, gleicht dem, der den ersten bestreitet. Wahrlich, für meinen Sohn existiert eine Verborgenheit, die alle Leute in Zweifel stürzt, außer diejenigen, die Gott beschützt." (Bihar al-anwar, Bd. 51, S. 160)*

Gegenteilige Ansichten zur Existenz des Imam Mahdi bestehen im Protest, dass es unwahrscheinlich sei, dass ein menschliches Leben über Jahrhunderte währt. Hierzu ist anzumerken, dass das Leben des Imam an sich ungewöhnlich ist, doch ungewöhnlich niemals unmöglich bedeutet. Der Denkfehler hierbei liegt meines Erachtens im fehlenden Verständnis des Menschen und seiner gegenwärtigen Entwicklungs- und Vollkommenheitsstufe, dass ihm die nötige Erkenntnis und das Wissen fehlen, um es tatsächlich zu begreifen. Doch ist es nicht auch so, dass in den Wissenschaften Tag für Tag Dinge entdeckt bzw. bewiesen werden, die man bis dahin für unmöglich hielt, obwohl sie unerkannt von uns existieren? Ebenso ist es denkbar, dass in den menschlichen Zellen irgendein für uns nicht bzw. noch nicht erkannter Stoff existiert, der ein langes Leben ermöglichen kann. Schließlich beschäftigen sich unzählige Forscher mit Studien zur Möglichkeit der Verlängerung menschliches Leben.

Proteste aus den Reihen der monotheistischen Religionen verwundern hingegen eher, da ihre Anhänger doch auf Grund

der ihnen offenbarten heiligen Schriften an die Wunder der Propheten glauben, diese akzeptieren und ebenso der Glaube an den verheißenen Messias vorhanden ist.

Der Sinn des Imamats besteht doch darin, dass den Menschen eine Leitung und Führung in äußerer wie innerer Form widerfährt, ihr geistiges Leben geordnet wird und sie in ihren Handlungen und den erlangten Wahrheiten zu Gott leitet.

Egal um was es sich handelt, wenn es Gottes Wille ist, so sagt er nur: „Sei!" und es ist, und Er bringt die Dinge, die sind, ins Dasein, Er bringt die dem menschlichen Auge und der menschlichen Wahrnehmung verborgenen Dinge hervor. Dinge, die wir Menschen auf Grund unseres begrenzten Verstandes, unseres noch unvollkommenen Menschseins nicht wahrnehmen und begreifen können.

Der Imam ist über das Innen mit der Seele der Leute verbunden, auch wenn er körperlich verdeckt bleibt. Seine Existenz ist jederzeit notwendig, auch wenn sein Erscheinen und damit einhergehende Reformen noch nicht begonnen haben, noch nicht eingetroffen sind, weil die Zeit noch nicht reif, der Mensch noch nicht reif, sein Erkenntnis- und Wissensstand noch nicht reif sind.

Der Mensch erscheint in seiner größeren Individualität des Menschseins wie Gottes Bild gegenwärtig noch auf einer Entwicklungsstufe des Wachsens und Werdens. Erst wenn diese Stufe abgeschlossen ist, der Mensch in seinem Sein voll entwickelt ist, wird er die gesamte Schöpfung erkennen, das Verborgene ihm offenkundig werden und er wird wissen. Und sowie er den wahren inneren Sinn des Wortes wissen wird, wird er seine Handlungen dementsprechend ändern. Er wird dann seine wahre Bestimmung erkennen und der Imam (a.) wird ihm sichtbar werden, der sich erhebt aus dem Verborgenen nachdem der letzte Schleier an Erkenntnis und Wissen gelüftet.

Diese Vorstellung ist in meinen Augen vergleichbar mit einem Bild das in tausende und abertausende Puzzleteile zerfallen ist, dass mühsam mit dem Verstand Teil für Teil zusammengefügt werden muss, um das einheitliche Ganze zu sehen, zu begreifen, das Bild der Schöpfung in seiner Gänze zu erkennen. Dann wird erkannt, es fällt dem Menschen wie Schuppen von den Augen, dass jedes der abertausenden Teile auf den ersten Blick, unscheinbar, unförmig, unpassend in Ton, Farbe, Gestalt wirkt, seinen festen angestammten, ihm zugedachten Platz im größeren Ganzen einnimmt und dies erst Sinn ergibt und die Platzverteilung bzw. Aufgaben gerecht sind.

Die geistige Botschaft des Islam liegt im Erkennen Gottes, die zu Erlösung und Glückseligkeit führt.

Dem Menschen ist es naturgegeben eigen, dass er vielen Zwecken des Lebens und materiellen Freuden verfallen ist, manche von ihnen sind schön und gut, andere wiederum übel und schlecht bis hin zu Zerstörendem.

Aber wenn wir Menschen unser wahres gottgegebenes Wesen erkennen, werden wir entdecken, dass all dies für den Menschen erschaffen wurde und nicht der Mensch für diese. Es sind die Dinge, die dem Menschen hinterherlaufen, beispielsweise die viele Werbung, mit denen uns die Konzerne zum Konsum von oft Unnützem auffordern, und nicht der Mensch ist hinter diesen her, es sei denn, er lässt sich manipulieren.

Der Mensch ist ein gottgegebenes Wesen mit der Logik der Vernunft, der Wärme des Herzens und der Seele, und er ist in diesem Sinne aufgefordert, den Weg der Wahrheit zu befolgen und nicht den der unwillkürlichen Arten von Selbstsucht, Egoismus und Lüsternheit, nicht der Logik des Bauches, der Begierden, und auch nicht der Logik der wilden Tiere. Der Mensch ist Teil der Schöpfung ohne Eigenmacht und Willkür, nur die Illusion glaubt dies. Dem Menschen obliegt es auch nicht, die widerspenstige Natur nach seinem Willen zu zähmen und Gott spielen zu wollen. Es steht ihm nicht zu und

liegt nicht in seiner Macht. Wohin dies führt, wenn er es dennoch versucht, sehen wir alltäglich an den Ergebnissen im Raubbau mit der Natur, seien es Katastrophen verursacht durch unsachgemäße Ausbeutung der Erde und ihrer Schätze oder seien es die Klonversuche mancher Wissenschaftler, um hier nur einige Beispiele zu nennen. Der Mensch entspringt dem Sein in seiner unendlichen Größe und Ausweitung und nicht das Sein dem Menschen. Alles, was der Mensch meint zu erschaffen, beruht einzig auf den Willen Gottes, der erschafft, wenn, was, wann, wo und wie Er will.

Die Schönheit der Gesamtheit der Schöpfung wird erst im Glanze des Lichtes Gottes auf einer Erde, auf der Gerechtigkeit herrscht, erkannt und begriffen werden. Einzig Gott und Seine Wirklichkeit ist unvergänglich, durch Ihn werden die Farbe und Essenz des Seins und erst durch Sein Licht, dass wir als vollkommen gewordenen Menschen wahrnehmen werden können, wird alles deutlich und sichtbar für uns werden.

Daraus folgt eine Erkenntnis: Der Mensch muss sich selbst der Ursprünglichkeit und Unabhängigkeit seiner selbst und aller Dinge entledigen und sich dem Einen Gott anschließen und sich vor ihm verneigen, vor seiner Herrlichkeit. Die Erkenntnis von all dem erreichen wir durch Gotteserkenntnis. Dann wird der Mensch wahrhaftig gottergeben sein, sich vollkommen ergeben in die Wahrheit und den Islam und in Gottes Weisungen. Dies entspricht der letzten Stufe der Vollkommenheit des Menschen. Die höchste an menschlicher Vollkommenheit ist dem Imam eigen, die ihm durch die Gnade Gottes verliehen ist. Der Mensch kann sich durch eigenes ständiges und beharrliches Bemühen dieser Vollkommenheit auf unterschiedlichen Stufen nähern, dem Imam folgen, seine Führung anerkennen und ihm folgen. Darin besteht die wahre Anhängerschaft des Imam. Die Erkenntnis Gottes und des Imam sind voneinander untrennbar, wie das Wissen um Gott und das Selbst untrennbar sind, durch die Erkenntnis an sich sind diese schon bares Sein, die Erkenntnis des Seins des unabhängigen Gottes.

Die Gerechtigkeit, von der wir sprechen, meint nicht eine Gerechtigkeit, die sich auf Gruppen oder Gebiete beschränkt, nein, sie meint eine universelle Gerechtigkeit, universell auf der ganzen Welt und universell unter allen Menschen und Geschöpfen.

Der Quran sagt dazu in Sura an-Nur (24), Vers 55:

„Allah hat denjenigen von, die glauben und rechtschaffene Werke tun, versprochen, dass Er sie ganz gewiss als Statthalter (Nachfolgern, Nachfolgern vorangegangener Völker) auf der Erde einsetzen wird, so wie Er diejenigen, die vor ihnen waren, als Statthalter einsetzte, dass Er für sie ihrer Religion, der Er für sie zugestimmt hat, ganz gewiss eine feste Stellung verleihen wird, und dass Er ihnen nach ihrer Angst (in der sie gelebt haben), stattdessen ganz gewiss Sicherheit gewähren wird. Sie dienen Mir und gesellen Mir nichts bei. Wer aber danach ungläubig ist, jene sind die (wahren) Frevler."

Der Zweck der Entsendung aller Propheten besteht darin, die Menschen anzuleiten zu einer gesunden und guten Beziehung zwischen Geschöpf und Schöpfer, d. h. in der Anbetung des Einen Gottes, und zu gesunden und guten zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen auf der Grundlage von Frieden, Gerechtigkeit, Freundschaft, Zusammenarbeit, Wohlwollen, Hilfe füreinander usw.

Gott spricht im Qur'an:

„O Prophet, Wir haben dich gesandt als Zeugen, als Verkünder froher Botschaft und als Warner." (sura al-ahzab (33), Vers 45)

„Und wir sandten bereits Nuh und Ibrahim und richteten in ihrer Nachkommenschaft das Prophetentum und die Schrift ein. Unter ihnen gab es (einige, die) rechtgeleitet (waren),

aber viele von ihnen waren Frevler." (Sura al-Hadid (57), Vers 26)

Bezüglich der so eben zitierten Vers ist zu erwähnen, wenn manche Menschen die Existenz des Mahdi und seine Wiederkehr nach Jahrhunderten in Frage stellen und dass ein solch langes Leben unwahrscheinlich wäre, dass der Prophet Nuh (Noah) zu dem Zeitpunkt, als er von Gott den Befehl zum Bau der Arche erhielt, bereits um die 1000 Jahre alt gewesen sein soll und wie viele Jahre er danach weitergelebt hat, weiß man nicht. Und doch akzeptieren es diese Menschen, dass es so gewesen ist. Ebenso singt der Volksmund in Liedern, dass der Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) uralt und weise gewesen sei. Uralt ist in dem Sinne zu verstehen, dass er wesentlich älter war als Menschen es für gewöhnlich sind.

Der Tag bzw. das Ausmaß dieses Tages der Gerechtigkeit wird allgemein und überall sein und frei von Unrecht, Gewalt, Diskriminierung, Krieg, Feindseligkeiten, Hass, Blutvergießen, Unterdrückung, Ausbeutung, Lüge, Betrug, List und Tücke, Heuchelei und Spaltung. Manche glauben, dass dies erst im Jenseits möglich wäre. Doch der Islam und insbesondere in der Shi'ah herrscht die Überzeugung vor, dass die Zeit von all diesen Übeln, Hässlichkeiten und Schändlichkeiten nicht immer sein wird, sondern nur eine vorübergehende Erscheinung. Letztendlich werden auf der Erde, am Ende ihrer Tage, Helligkeit und Licht, Frieden und Gerechtigkeit anzutreffen sein. Diese Realität entspricht der Tradition und dem Wollen Gottes, der Gerechtigkeit und das Gute auf der Erde für seine Schöpfung will. Irgendwann werden wirkliche Menschen herrschen, nur das Wann ist nicht zeitlich zu definieren und entzieht sich unserer Kenntnis. Wir können jedoch mit unseren guten Gedanken und guten Handlungen und Selbsterziehung auf dem Wege Gottes voranschreiten und uns bemühen, uns in Richtung vollkommenerer Mensch entwickeln.

Dem Menschen sind im Grunde seiner Schöpfung von Natur aus Fähigkeiten, Möglichkeiten und Aktivitäten gegeben mit

einem Anrecht auf vieles. Die Gerechtigkeit bezieht sich auf das, worauf er durch seine Qualitäten, Möglichkeiten und Aktivitäten Anspruch erwirbt und der ihm dann gegeben wird. Manche Philosophen Griechenlands und Europas vertreten die Ansicht, dass Gerechtigkeit gleichzusetzen wäre mit Gewalt, da diese dem Menschen durch herrschende Gesetzen, von Menschen erlassene Gesetze, aufgenötigt werden. Doch die wahre Gerechtigkeit im eigentlichen Sinne ist real und echt, weil das Recht in der Schöpfung wurzelt und ergo hat jeder einen Anspruch auf das, was ihm zusteht.

Bleibt die Frage zu klären, ob der Mensch an sich gerechtigkeitsliebend ist.

Die Natur des Menschen ist beschaffen mit ihm eigenen Neigungen und Besonderheiten, physischer und psychischer Natur. Der Mensch erfreut sich an Schönem, so wie Gott das Schöne liebt und Er es für seine Schöpfung auch will. Freude und Schönes und Gutes sind dem Menschen von Natur gegeben, eine schöpfungsbedingte Wesenheit des Menschen genauso wie das Interesse für Wissen und der Wille, zu Erkenntnis zu gelangen etc.

Zur Gerechtigkeit gehört ebenfalls die soziale Gerechtigkeit. Die Gerechtigkeit in den zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen als Teile einer Gemeinschaft.

Hierzu gibt es verschiedene Theorien:

Die einen meinen, diese wäre dem Menschen fremd, und nicht naturgegeben, sondern eine Erfindung der Schwachen gegenüber dem Starken und Mächtigen, da sich der Schwache nicht wehren könne bzw. wenn er die Macht an sich gebracht hätte, nicht anders handeln würde als die vormals Mächtigen. Philosophen wie Nietzsche und Machiavel vertreten die Ansicht, dass der Mensch nicht an Gerechtigkeit glaube und auch nicht von dieser überzeugt wäre. Die einen sprächen vom Wunsch nach Gerechtigkeit und könnten ihm nicht nachgeben, die anderen strebten die Macht und Kraft an.

Eine andere Theorie besagt, man müsse sich um Gerechtigkeit bemühen, weil sie dem Wohle aller entspräche, sprechen ihr aber ebenso die Naturgegebenheit ab wie die Vertreter der ersten Theorie. Gerechtigkeit wäre demnach nicht erzwingbar, da sie nicht vorhanden ist. Man müsse, Verstand, Geist und Wissensstand fördern, da der Mensch zwar nutzbringend und profitorientiert sei, er jedoch nicht ohne soziale Gerechtigkeit auskäme, weil ihm sonst Nachteile daraus entstünden. Ebenso wäre es dem Menschen naturgegeben, anderen Gewalt an zu tun, man müsse ihn dazu bringen, dass er überlege, dies nicht zu tun, weil der andere sonst zurückschlagen würde. Es folgt die Mahnung vernünftig zu sein und richtig zu denken, da eine Gerechtigkeit im Interesse aller wäre. Diese Theorie erweist sich als schwach, sie impliziert Angst vor Stärke, wenn jedoch diese Stärke erzielt wird, führt sie zu Selbstgefälligkeit und sich Erheben bzw. Vorgehen gehen Schwache.

Eine dritte Theorie ist die marxistische. Vertreter dieser Theorie sind der Ansicht, dass Gerechtigkeit möglich ist, aber nicht durch den Menschen, sondern durch die Mittel der sich entwickelnden Technologie und Wirtschaft. Veränderungen in den Besitzverhältnissen bei den Produktionsmitteln würden den antagonistischen Widerspruch zwischen Produktivkräften und Produktionsmitteln durch Veränderung der Produktionsverhältnisse aufheben und Gerechtigkeit entstünde. Dann würde das sozialistische Weltsystem unweigerlich siegen. Dieser Gedanke ist ebenso falsch, da auch er die Menschen aufteilt in Gruppierungen, in Klassen, und im Prinzip die Maschinen herrschen. Es würde sich hier nur um eine angestrebte Gleichheit unter den Menschen handeln, jedoch nicht um Gerechtigkeit. Auch hier wären die Gesetze von Menschen gemacht und damit mit Fehlern behaftet.

Die islamische Weltanschauung in ihrem wahren Wesen kennt weder Klassen noch Gruppierungen. Sie besagt stattdessen, das einzige, was fehlt, ist die menschliche Vollkommenheit, die als ein Wesensmerkmal der Veranlagung

dem Menschen innewohnt und die er entwickeln muss. Hierfür braucht er entsprechende Lehrer, eine entsprechende Erziehung, die ihn zu Erkenntnis und Gerechtigkeit, dass diese gut und erstrebenswert sind, bringen. Der sich auf dem Pfade der Vollkommenheit entwickelnde Mensch wird begreifen, dass er das Wohl der Allgemeinheit vor seinen eigenes Wohl stellt. Er möchte dann Gerechtigkeit für alle und liebt diese. Gerechtigkeit ist eine Schönheit des Geistes, die nicht fassbar ist.

Der Islam widerlegt all die anderen Theorien. Es gibt all jene Menschen, die gerechtigkeitsliebend sind, ohne einen Nutzen daraus erzielen zu wollen. Das Ziel ist der Wunsch im Bemühen um Gerechtigkeit und ein vollkommener Mensch zu werden. Die Gerechtigkeitsliebe ist dem vollkommenen Menschen eigen.

Die Annahme, dass der Imam Mahdi (a.) erschiene, wenn die Welt sich in finsterer Dekadenz befände, ist irrig. Im Usul Kafi wird hierzu berichtet, dass wenn der Mahdi erscheint, Gott die Menschen erkennen lässt und ihr Verstand und ihre Vernunft wachsen werden. Die Menschen werden begreifen und entsprechend handeln und wenn es soweit ist, wird Frieden unter allen Menschen und Geschöpfen sein. Die Natur des vermeintlich „Bösen" wird hinweg genommen sein, selbst wilde Tiere werden dessen beraubt und friedvoll sein.

Die Aufgabe der Religion ist es, den Menschen nach und nach die Augen zu öffnen. Des Menschen Denken weitet sich entsprechend seinem Entwicklungsstand. Er wäre überfordert, wenn er von Anbeginn mit allem, was Gott erschuf, konfrontiert worden wäre und würde. Des Menschen Dasein auf der Erde durchläuft bei sich selbst und im größeren Maße über vielzählige Generationen die Entwicklungsstufen vergleichbar mit denen eines Kindes über das Jugendalter zum Erwachsenwerden, wobei der Mensch nach und nach seinen Fähigkeiten entdeckt, lernt, begreift, erkennt und seine Handlungen entsprechend seinem Entwicklungsstand anpasst. Gegenwärtig leben wir in einer Zeit des ungestümen

Aufbruchs. Zur Zeit des Erscheinens des Imam Mahdi (a.) wird die Menschheit erwachsener geworden sein, was meint, es bricht eine Zeit der Vervollkommnung, der Wissenschaft, des Verstandes, der Ethik und der menschlichen Gesellschaft an.

Sowohl Gelehrte der schiitischen wie sunnitischen Konfession überliefern, dass, wenn dem Diesseits nur noch ein Tag bliebe, Gott diesen einen Tag solange ausdehnen würde, bis der Imam Mahdi (a.) erscheint und seine gerechte Herrschaft auf Erden errichtet, weil dies von Gott so beschlossen ist.

Ebenso gibt es eine Prophetenaussage, dass der Mahdi kommen wird, wenn die Menschheit voller Kontroversen und Auseinandersetzungen ist, in einer erdbebenreichen Zeit. Gemeint sind hiermit nicht nur Erdbeben im wörtlichen Sinne, sondern das was geschieht verursacht durch menschliches Wirken, und Mensch wie Natur in großer Gefahr sein werden. Den Mahdi werden wir erleben, wenn das Maß an Ungerechtigkeit und Tyrannei überschritten ist, dann wird er für Gerechtigkeit und Frieden auf Erden sorgen zum Wohlgefallen Gottes und zur Freude seiner Geschöpfe, einem Prophetenwort entsprechend. Die Schätze der Welt werden dann gerecht verteilt werden.

Der Mahdi wird die zu jener Zeit Herrschenden und ihre Stellvertreter zur Rechenschaft ziehen, diese berichtigen und Gerechtigkeit herstellen. Das Verborgene und Unerkannte wird enthüllt, das Ungekannte offenkundig. Jenen, die von Menschenrechten und Freiheit reden, wird offensichtlich gemacht werden, dass ihre bisherigen Annahmen darüber weit entfernt von der Realität sind. Die Heiligen Schriften werden eine Widerbelebung erfahren. Jene, die den Armen helfen möchten, werden keine finden, denen sie helfen können, weil Armut und Bedürftigkeit verschwinden werden. Es wird allen Ortens Sicherheit für Frauen wie für alle Menschen geben, so dass sie sich ungehindert bewegen können ohne eines Schutzes zu bedürfen. Es werden Friedfertigkeit, Freundschaft, Sicherheit, Freiheit unter den

Menschen und eine gerechte Verteilung der Reichtümer der Erde nach den Gesetzen Gottes allgegenwärtig sein. Die Menschen werden aufrichtig und ehrlich in ihren Reden und Taten sein. Lüge, Betrug, Argwohn, Hinterlist und ähnliches wird ihnen dann fremd sein. Der Mensch wird erkennen, dass Gerechtigkeit als natürliche, gottgegebene, selbst gewollte Gerechtigkeit mehr in sicht trägt, als nur das Recht des anderen nicht zu verletzen, damit er das seinige nicht verletzt. Das Handeln der Menschen wird dann gerecht und selbstlos sein. Der Mensch vollendet sich in seiner Entwicklung zur Vollkom menheit unter einer gerechten Herrschaft auf der ganzen Welt, die sich stützt auf Gottesgewissheit, Gotterkennen, Gottergebenheit und ist orientiert am Qur'an, dem Wort Gottes.

Muhammad ibn ´Adschlan überlieferte von Abu ´Abdillah (Imam Sadiq, a.), dass er sagte: „Wenn der Qa´im (a.) kommt, wird er die Menschen aufs Neue zum Islam einladen und sie zu etwas geleiten, was verloren gegangen war, und von dem die Masse (der Menschen) abgeirrt war. Er wird nur deswegen „al-Mahdi" (derjenige, der leitet) genannt, weil er sie zu etwas leitet, von dem sie abgeirrt waren, und er wird „al-Qa´im" (derjenige, der sich erhebt) genannt, weil er sich mit der Wahrheit erheben wird." („A´lam al-Wara":431)

Die Religion des Islam birgt in sich den positiven Zukunftsgedanken gemäß Gottes Willen. Der Weg dahin und zum Erscheinen des Imam Mahdi (a.) ist „bestes Tun", wie es in Bihar ul Anwar, B. 52, Kapitel 122 überliefert wird.

Im Qur'an heisst es dazu in Sura al-i-Imran (3), Vers 103:

„Und haltet alle fest am Seil Allahs und geht nicht auseinander! Und gedenkt Allahs Gunst an euch, als ihr Feinde wart und Er dann eure Herzen zusammenführte, worauf ihr durch Seine Gunst Brüder wurdet. Und (als) ihr am Rand einer Feuergrube wart und Er euch dann davor errettete. So macht Allah euch Seine Zeichen klar, auf dass ihr rechtgeleitet werden möget!

Verschiedentlich wird die Ansicht vertreten, dass der Erwartungsgedanken „Mahdawiyat" erst ab der Zeit der Geburt des Imam Mahdis im 3. Jahrhundert nach der Hijjra entstanden wäre. Doch dem widersprechen Qur'an und Ahadith.

Beispielsweise in Sure al-Anbiya (21), Vers 105:
„Und Wir haben bereits im Buch der Weisheit (zabur) nach der Ermahnung geschrieben, das Meine rechtschaffenen Diener das Land (die Erde) erben werden."

Oder auch in Sura as-Saff (61), Vers 9:

„Er ist es, Der Seinen Gesandten mit der Rechtleitung und der Religion der Wahrheit gesandt hat, um ihr die Oberhand über alle Religion zu geben (um sich sichtbar zu machen), auch wenn es den Götzendienern zuwider ist."

Der Propheten gab in seinen Worten an seine Gemeinschaft viele Hinweise auf das Erscheinen des Mahdi, diese sind sunnitischen wie schiitischen Muslimen gleichwohl bekannt und vertraut. Der Erwartungsgedanken an den Mahdi selbst wurde unter der Gemeinschaft der Muslime etwa ab Mitte des 1. Jhd. nach Hijjra spürbar.

Entsprechend der Weisheit 147 im Najul Balagha ist überliefert, dass Imam Ali, Amir al Muminin, am Schluss eines Gespräches mit Kumayl, wo er über das Wissen sprach, und das, was er weiß, und er es niemandem sagen könne etc.: *„... Allerdings – die Erde wird niemals ohne Gottes Hujjat sein. Das heißt, Gottes Hujjat – offenkundig oder aber verborgen – wird es immer auf Erden geben ..."*

Manche hegen die Gedanken im Hinblick auf das Erscheinen des Mahdi, dass man nichts gegen Tyrannei, Gewalt, Ungerechtigkeit usw. unternehmen solle und nur abwarten, bis es so schlimm würde, dass die Verheissung komme. Diese Leute sind gegen jegliche Verbesserungen und

Reformen und auch gegen eine Erstarkung der Ummah, es dürfe nichts unternommen werden, bis der Mahdi kommt. Dies ist jedoch eine falsche Annahme. Dinge müssen sich entwickeln und heranwachsen, wie das Saatkorn im verborgenen Boden und wenn es die Stufe erreicht hat, durch die Erde in seinem Wachsen hervorbricht, genauso scheinbar explosionsartig wie umwälzende Veränderungen und Revolutionen, wenn man ihre Vorboten und die Prozesse, die diesen vorangehen, übersieht.

Die Religion gebietet das Gute und verwehrt das Schlechte. Gemäß diesem Grundsatz besteht ebenso die Pflicht keine Verpflichtung gegenüber Gott zu unterlassen.

Der Mahdi ist bisher noch nicht erschienen, da der Mensch die entsprechende Reife und den Grad an Vollkommenheit, der hierfür erforderlich ist, noch nicht erreicht hat. Die Entwicklung der Menschheit gleicht einer sich nach oben höher entwickelnden Spirale. Es gibt Überschneidungspunkte, Dinge, die scheinbar im Wiederkommen sind, allerdings auf einer höheren Ebene. Verwirrung und Entwirrung wechseln sich dabei ab auf der jeweiligen Entwicklungsstufe. Das weltweite Chaos wird sich in logischer Konsequenz weltweit zuspitzen, um sich darauf wieder abzuwechseln mit Zeiten von Ordnung, Regeln und Harmonie, um darauf auf höherer Stufe wieder Chaos mit sich zu bringen. Unsere Bemühungen sollten dahingehend sein, aufzuklären, zu reformieren, zu beschleunigen, zu verbessern, da wir dabei heranreifen und wachsen ebenso auf höherer Stufe und uns in Vollkommenheit weiterentwickeln können, um eines Tages reif zu sein für das Erscheinen des Mahdi, dass dann völlig unerwartet über uns hereinkommen wird.

Der Prophet (s.) und die nach ihm folgenden Imame lebten uns vor, was Gerechtigkeit (al adl) ist und was sie in sich birgt. Ali (a.) sagt in seiner 437. Weisheit im Najul Balagha:

„Die Gerechtigkeit platziert die Dinge an der richtigen Stelle."

Gerechtigkeit ist ein Schöpfungsprinzip, ihr Sinn und Ziel. Die Religion steht hierbei für Gerechtigkeit nach den Prinzipien einer höheren Gerechtigkeit, die Gott gegeben ist und die wir kennenlernen und verinnerlichen müssen. Die Religion fungiert hierbei als unser Wegweiser zur Vollkommenheit und Gerechtigkeit. Gott hat seine Schöpfung planvoll und zielbewusst gestaltet. Wollen wir ein Gott gegebenes Leben führen und uns ihm nähern, so kommen wir nicht umhin, ebenfalls unser Leben zu planen und ihm ein Ziel dessen untergeordnet zu geben. Gott will dabei, dass seine Schöpfung als Mensch wahrlich menschlich wird, vollkommen wird, sich seiner Vollkommenheit nähert. Wir müssen erkennen lernen, dass jedes Ding, jede Form ihren ihm eigenen Platz und ihre ihm eigenen Eigenschaften in der gesamten Schöpfung innehat.

Gott hat uns mit einem Willen ausgestattet, der uns befähigt, dass ein jeder sich für seinen Lebensweg entscheidet. Ein jeder hat die Wahl zwischen richtig und falsch, gut und böse zu unterscheiden. Dies bedingt durch seinen individuellen Grad an Erkenntnis, seinem individuellem Wissensstand, seinen individuellen Zielen und wie und auf welche Art und Weise er diese nützt, wie ein jeder sein Denken und seine Handlungen bedenkt sowohl für das Diesseits als auch für das Jenseits. Gott leitet dabei jene recht, wen Er will und wer sich um Gottes Nähe bemüht und seinen Weg sucht, dem wird Er helfen. Der Teufel, sowohl der Innere, das eigene Ego, als auch der Äußere, müht sich ebenfalls den Menschen vom echten Weg auf seinen Weg abzubringen. Er flüstert ein, das Diesseits zu nutzen für seinen eigenen Nutzen und die anderen nicht zu bedenken und das Jenseits nicht zu bedenken, seinen Trieben und Begierden zu folgen, wie Machtstreben, Eigennutz und Profitstreben, die Rechte der anderen beiseite zu lassen und diese sogar zu übertreten. Und lässt sie so zu Tätern an seiner Schöpfung werden und macht Teile seiner Schöpfung zu Opfern. Unterdrückung, Tyrannei und Ungerechtigkeit sind die Folge dessen.

Doch Gott ermahnt uns, das Richtige zu tun, beispielsweise sagt er in Sura an-Nahl (16), Vers 90:

„Allah gebietet Gerechtigkeit, gütig zu sein und den Verwandten zu geben; Er verbietet das Schändliche, das Verwerfliche und die Gewalttätigkeit. Er ermahnt euch, auf dass ihr bedenken möget."

Oder in Sura al-Hadid (57), Vers 25:

„Wir haben ja Unsere Gesandten mit den klaren Beweisen gesandt und mit ihnen die Schrift und die Waage herabkommen lassen, damit die Menschen für die Gerechtigkeit eintreten. Und Wir haben das Eisen herabkommen lassen. In ihm ist starke Gewalt und Nutzen für die Menschen -, damit Allah kennt (vor sich selbst und den Menschen kenntlich macht), wer Ihm und Seinen Gesandten im Verborgenen hilft. Gewiss, Allah ist stark und allmächtig."

In diesem Vers, der sich auf alle Gesandten bezieht, wird auch deutlich, dass alle Menschen über ihre verschiedenen Propheten zur Gerechtigkeit und Rechtleitung gemahnt werden. Gerechtigkeit zeigt sich im Leben und im Frieden, Ungerechtigkeit hingegen verdirbt das Leben und bringt Drangsal und Tod.

Gott spricht in Vers 29 der Sura Al-A'raf (7):

„Sag: Mein Herr hat Gerechtigkeit geboten, und ihr sollt euer Gesicht bei jeder Gebetsstätte aufrichten und Ihn anrufen, (wobei ihr) Ihm gegenüber aufrichtig in der Religion (sein sollt). So wie Er euch anfangs gebracht hat, werdet ihr zurückkehren."

Meiner Meinung nach bezieht sich das Aufrichten bei jeder Gebetsstätte nicht ausschließlich auf die rituellen Gebete, sondern auf alles, was wir tun im Gedenken Gottes, auf unsere guten Handlungen im gesellschaftlichen und sozialen Leben, unsere Arbeiten, die wir erledigen, unser Umgang mit

unserer Familie, Nachbarn, Freunden, Kollegen und auch mit unseren Feinden.

Die Gerechtigkeit geht auch immer mit der Wahrheit einher. Es kann keine Gerechtigkeit ohne Wahrheit geben und die Wahrheit führt zur Gerechtigkeit. Mit einigen Anstrengungen ist die Gerechtigkeit annäherungsweise in verschiedenen Stufen und an verschiedenen Orten gegenwärtig, jedoch nicht die höhere Gerechtigkeit, die von Gott gewollte, für alle Menschen und an allen Orten der Welt. Solange arm neben reich existiert, solange Menschen unterdrückt werden und diskriminiert auf Grund ihrer Herkunft , ihrer Nationalität, solange Menschen mancher Staaten die Menschen anderer Staaten überfallen, unterdrücken, ausrauben, und dergleichen mehr, gibt es keine wahre Gerechtigkeit. Die wahre Gerechtigkeit kann erst erzielt werden, wenn der Mensch reicher an Vollkommenheit, Wissen und Weisheit sein wird. Um dies zu erlangen, benötigt der Mensch einen Weg, eine Religion, sein Herz und sein Verstand müssen bereit sein zu empfangen, sein Geist bereit zum Erkennen und alles im Einklang miteinander zu verstehen.

170 Ungerechtigkeit bringt Kummer, Sorgen und Not mit sich. Mit der Gerechtigkeit hingegen kehrt Ruhe und Friede ein. Dies ist so im Mikrokosmos des einzelnen Individuums und überträgt sich auf den Makrokosmos der menschlichen Gesellschaft. Jemand der ungerecht gegen sich selbst ist, wird auch ungerecht im gesellschaftlichen Leben sein. Eine Gesellschaft kann sich nicht gut weiter entwickeln, wenn manche Teile von ihr übervorteilt werden und die anderen Teile dafür ihres Rechtes beraubt werden.

Nur eine gerechte Gesellschaft mit Menschen, die gerecht gegenüber sich selbst und anderen sind, kann sich stabil entwickeln, was zur Zufriedenheit und Ausgewogenheit der Gemeinschaft führt. Wenn die Waagschalen gleich voll sind, lassen sich Herausforderungen und Probleme leichter und besser lösen bzw. tritt so manches Problem erst gar nicht auf. Die Gesellschaft als ganzes spiegelt sich in dem Grade der

Entwicklung und Vervollkommnung ihrer einzelnen Individuen wider. Ungerechtigkeit führt zur Werteverschiebung in der Gesellschaft, und wie viel hören wir und erleben wir gegenwärtig davon. Verdrehung der Wahrheiten, üble Nachrede, Verleumdung, ungerechte Verteilung der Güter sind an der Tagesordnung. Die Armen werden immer ärmer, während die Reichen immer reicher werden. Die Menschen spalten sich bzw. sind gespalten in Gruppierungen je nach Stand und Interesse, in der Endkonsequenz zerfällt die Gesellschaft.

Imam Ali sagte diesbezüglich:

„Der Untergang der Staaten wird durch vier Merkmale erkannt: Verlust der Fundamente, Festhalten an Nebensächlichkeiten, Bevorzugung niederträchtiger Menschen und Verstoßung angesehener Menschen" (Ghurar al-Hikam, B. 2, S. 386)

In seiner 32. Predigt im Najul Balagha mahnt Imam Ali die Gläubigen:

„O ihr Menschen, wir leben in einer düsteren und undankbaren Zeit! Wohltäter werden als Missetäter betrachtet und Missetäter als Wohltäter, und die Tyrannen werden zunehmend bösartiger! Wir ziehen keinen Nutzen aus dem, was wir gelernt haben und fragen nicht nach dem, was wir nicht wissen, und fürchten kein Unheil, bis es uns heimsucht!"

Und Gott warnt die Menschen im Qur'an vor ungerechtem Tun. Wir lesen z. B. in in Sura Al-i-Imran (3), Vers 21:

„Diejenigen, die Allahs Zeichen verleugnen, die Propheten zu Unrecht töten und diejenigen unter den Menschen töten, die Gerechtigkeit befehlen, denen verkünde schmerzhafte Strafe!"

Die Gerechtigkeit ist die Grundlage allen Seins, ihre Aufrechterhaltung und Hinführung ist Grundsatz von Glaube

und Vernunft. Im Umgang mit der Gerechtigkeit müssen wir einerseits innere Widerstände, die im Charakter liegen bedenken, wir müssen gerecht gegen uns selbst sein und in äußeren Widerständen gerecht gegen andere sein, ihre Rechte wahren. Dabei ist es wichtig, unsere Grenzen zu erkennen und zu wahren. Menschen, die sich selbst unterdrücken, können nicht gerecht gegenüber anderen sein, oftmals potenziert sich die Selbstunterdrückung des Innerenn in der Unterdrückung nach außen.

Gott spricht von diesen Menschen im Qur'an in Sura Al-i-Imran (3), Vers 135:

„Und diejenigen, die, wenn sie eine Abscheulichkeit begangen oder sich selber Unrecht zugefügt haben, Allahs gedenken und dann für ihre Sünden um Vergebung bitten- und wer sollte die Sünden vergeben außer Allah? – und (die) nicht auf dem beharren, was sie getan haben, wo sie doch wissen."

Der Islam basiert auf Gerechtigkeit und macht die Großzügigkeit überflüssig, weil alles gerecht verteilt ist, und ein jedes an seinem Platz. Gleichfalls verurteilt er jegliche Form von Unterdrückung. Akzeptiert der Unterdrückte seine Unterdrückung, so macht er sich mit schuldig an der Unterdrückung, da der Tyrann in Folge dessen dazu neigt, die Tyrannei zu erhöhen und die Schwäche des Gegners noch mehr auszunutzen.

In Man la yahdurhul Faqih (B. 2, S. 7) heisst es: *„Die Leute sind nur durch die Laster der Reichen arm, bedürftig, hungrig und kleiderlos geworden."*

Aus all den aufgezeigten Gründen ist es erforderlich, dass die Menschen sich ihres Menschseins bewusst werden, ihre Fähigkeiten erkennen, sich auf die Suche nach Wissen begeben, ihr Denken und Handeln weiterentwickeln, um vollkommener und reifer zu werden. Die Menschen müssen

sich selbst verbessern, um bereit zu sein für das Erscheinen des Mahdi, wenn Gott es will.

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The Mahdi (a.s.) is near

His appearance is inevitable and sure".

Clara López de Letona, Madrid (Spain)

FOREWORD

Throughout the history of mankind, there have been moments that we may define as moments of "hope and expectation". Currently, we are living one of those moments. International tension increases, but so does the hope and expectation in the appearance of an Avatar or a Messiah *.

The sanskrit word "Avatar" literally means "descended from afar". Ava expresses the idea, "far, distant". The root AV transmits the idea of "protection from on high". All Avatars or Messiahs express the love of God for humanity and the need of men for that love. They are divine intermediates who have managed to detach themselves from all material limitations and egoistic feelings in order to place themselves at the service of humanity.

His coming is awaited by millions of people in the world.

They, along the human history, have repeatedly come and changed the existing old order , bequeathing us a new bright future, replacing what was old and no longer served to human evolution.

They come when evil predominates over good and when desperate humanity, suffering under the yoke of injustice, oppression and lies, invokes their appearance. When men and women together take action and pray inside their harts to God, His love pours forth amongst them and the miracle of His appearance takes place.

No one can deny that we live today in a crucial age of social, political and economical changes. We can even talk about the

end of a civilization or culture; we can talk about chaos; about the human incapacity to resolve the enormous conflicts that these changes are generating in the present world. The appearance of the Saviour of mankind requires that those who believe in his manifestation pray God to hasten his appearance, work hard to make all necessary changes in their lives and in their communities and, at the same time, propagate their belief throughout all corners of the world, so, everybody will hear about his appearance and will await Him.

When millions of sincere people raise their eyes to God, humbly accepting that they have reached the limit of their human possibilities in resolving and managing the enormous and serious conflicts around the world and ask for help, God through the inscrutable mystery of His will and because the faith of his believers, "for God is love" *(1)* shall send amongst us the awaited Mahdi (a.s.).

* Along this article the Messiah or Avatar will be named as Mahdi (a.s.).

Every religion shall call him a different name, but He is the unique spiritual entity imprested with the power and glory of God. His mission is to bring the Kingdom of God to humanity and to develop and guide the spiritual evolution of all human beings in the world without distinction, giving each, man and woman, what their spirit needs to make their path towards his Creator.

I.- WHY THE TIME IS NOW

"In every age I come back to deliver the Holy, to destroy the sin of the sinner, to establish righteousness"(2)

The world in which the Mahdi (a.s). will appear is a new world.

His appearance will not be for a region but for the whole world. Nowadays, thanks to the new media technologies, it is possible to disseminate any world event to all the corners of

the planet. This was unheard of one or two thousand years ago. The advance technologies that we have nowadays will make His appearance different in time and ir magnitude to that of his predecessors. New systems of transportation make it possible for millions of persons to be able to go anywhere: *All eyes will see Him.*

Great regenerating forces are at work, making their presence felt in many groups that try to help and elevate humanity, rebuilding this world, restoring stability and the sense of security, and, in this way, consciously or unconsciously paving the way for the appearance of the awaited Mahdi (a.s.).

Every day, an increasing number of persons are ceasing to take interest in material things; they no longer give possessions a fundamental importance in their lives. They have acquired an exact sense of values and, above all, they are happy people, because they have learned to control their desires. They had chosen in their life to be honest with their neighbours, they always give words their just value, they live a simply life, they have noble thoughts; and they are in control of their aspirations.

They are the masters of their existence at all times. They live on their efforts and uphold high ideals that they incarnate with patience in theirs communities in which they live and have good relationships.

II.-HIS DOCTRINE WILL BRING A NEW WORLD RELIGION

From Ali´s (a.s.) point of view, the principle of justice is of crucial significance in preserving the balance of society and winning goodwill of the public. Its practice can ensure the health of society and bring peace to its soul . Oppresion, injustice and discrimination cannot bring peace and happiness.Justice is like a public highway which has a room for all and through which everyone may pass without impediment. Ali (a.s.) regards justice to be a duty and a Divine trust: rather, to him is a "Divine sanctity".

On a certain occasion, when he assumed the Caliphate, several politicians were disappointed by his manner of ruling and their disappointments soon turned into conspirations. Some friends warned him of what was happening, and advised him to wisely set aside affairs relating to equality and justice for the moment in order to pacify the situation. Imam Ali (a.), answered categorically: (3)

" *Do you ask me to seek support through injustice (to my subjects and to sacrifice justice for the sake of political advantage)? By God! I will not do it as long as the world lasts and one star follows another in the sky (i.e. I will not do it as long as the order of the universe exist). Even if it were my own property I would distribute it with justice, and why not when is the property of God and when I am His trustee?*

Restoring lost dignity to mankind, elevating them from the state of constant preoccupation for material things and teaching them to confide in Divine Providence will be one of the basic principles of the great task that the Mahdi (a.s.) will carry out.

Jesus of Nazareth gave us beautiful examples of God´s providence when : (4) *"He said to (his) disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more that food and the body more than clothing. Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than that birds! Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your lifespan? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you so anxious about the rest?*

Like the hero, the saint is also an exceptional being. The saint does not know inner struggle when he is submitted to extreme situation. He does not compromise himself if it demands to go against his own convictions and faith; he would rather prefer to die. God´s love fills his heart and nothing can be comparable to him.

On another level of sainthood would be the saint who devotes his life to the poor and the suffering. These saints, men and women of charity, devote themselves to human beings in the hope of attaining the love of God through their service. The needy for them are the instrument that will permit them to bring God's kingdom and justice to the world. These are the contemporary saints, those who place their lives at the service of those who suffer social injustices, and step by step they go about establishing social justice and peace. They are heroes, because they live in the world and for the world; they do not move away from it, they look life in the eye, acknowledging and suffering in themselves the evil that each day brings, and, without aspiring to receive any glory other than the love of God, they struggle without rest every day to transmute darkness into light.

The idea of the immortality of the soul has been seen emerging in humanity since the remotest of ages. Instinctively, man has believed and intuited that physical death does not constitute the end of his existence, of his struggle, of his love and human aspiration. Something called upon him to go beyond his physical environment. Those men still did not have the capacity to think, they had still not developed their intellect like contemporary man, but they followed their instinct, which led them upward. They looked at the sky, contemplated the stars, and had the intuition that something more existed than the stars that they observed. Something above everything else that they could see and which was protecting them.

III.- SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORLD TODAY

Henri de Lubac asks himself what the high ambitions of this humanism have been reduced to. He asks himself what has become of man as conceived by this atheist humanism.

And he responds:*(5)*

"A being that can still hardly be called a being.

A thing that has no content, a cell completely merged in a mass that is in process of " becoming".

Social-and-historical man', of which all that remains is pure abstraction, apart from the social relations and the position in time by which he is defined.

There is no stability or depth left in him".

Henri de Lubac expresses his fears:

"There is nothing to prevent his being used as material or as a tool either for the preparation of some future society or for ensuring, here and now, the dominance of one privileged group.

There is not even anything to prevent his being cast aside as useless.

Moreover, he can be conceive under different types of man. This types could vary even to the point of contradiction, according a biological or economic system of explanation or according his purpose as part of mankind history. But beneath these diversities there is always the same fundamental creature, or rather the same absence of any creature. For this man has literally been dissolved. In reality, there is no longer any man because there is no longer anything that is great in that man".

As Nicolás Berdiaev would say: *"where there is no God, neither would man exist." (6)*

Gustave Thibon is very concise when he says: (7) *"God is not only a norm imposed upon man which steers and drives him; He is the Absolute on which man is based, the Loved One that draws him, the Beyond that spurs him, the Eternal that prepares the only clime he can breathe, and He is, in any case, that third dimension in which Man finds his depth. If man becomes his own God, he may entertain the illusion of being uplifted and liberated for some time: ephemeral exaltation! It is God that he degrades, and not much time will pass before he in turn feels degraded."*

The year 2006 will mark the anniversary of the Declaration of 1981 regarding the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination against religion or conviction.

United Nations Special Rapporteur, Mrs Jahangir states with concern that for many people in the world today, freedom of religion or conviction is not a reality. In certain countries, religious intolerance has reached alarming levels.

The Special Rapporteur hopes that this anniversary can be an occasion to call for the promotion of freedom of religion and conviction, with the proposal to call attention to a matter of such transcendence for human beings. She asks the States and other international agents to attentively examine this question within the context of the efforts relating to the reform of the United Nations. (8)

According to the Human Rights Watch 2005 report, there has been an improvement in religious freedom for 2004. Nonetheless, the report reveals religious intolerance in many countries. I mention only three of them: (9)

Serbia: The government failed to respond to the explosion of ethnic and religious violence in March 2004.

China: Although religious practice is tolerated, official Communist Party doctrine holds that religion, as a belief structure and an organizational arrangement, will eventually wither and die. Until such a time, the Chinese government believes religion must be strictly controlled to prevent it from becoming a political force or an institution capable of competing with the state for the loyalty of China´s citizens.

Pakistan: Violence against religious communities increased significantly in 2004. At least 4,000 people, largely from the minority Shi´a Muslim have died as a result of violence since 1980. There has been a sharp increase in the number of targeted killings of Shi´a, particularly Shi´a doctors, in recent years.Those implicated in acts of sectarian violence are rarely prosecuted and virtually no action has been taken to protect the affected communities.

IV.- OBSTACLES FOR HIS APPEARANCE

The great difficulty we find nowadays in accepting the appearance of an Avatar or a Messiah amongst us is that, for centuries, nothing has happened. Those who sustain this idea

in the West nowadays are looked upon with a certain tolerant condescension and are sometimes seen as a joke. Nonetheless, if we analyse the world situation carefully, we can believe that the moment we are living is exceptional and that we stand before an extraordinary opportunity.

Children´s rights are often violated in many parts of the world. Although they are promised to receive a special protection under international law, they are routinely detained in abusive conditions. They face violence at the hands of other youths or prison guards. A vast majority of human rights crimes go unpunished, reflecting corruption and lack of access to justice, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of society.

The global commitment to overcoming inequality is fading. Eighty per cent of the world´s gross domestic product belongs to 1 billion people living in the develop world; the remaining 20 per cent is shared by the 5 billion people living in the developing countries. If we fail to adress this inequality predicament will ensure that social justice and better living conditions for all people remain elusive, and that the communities, countries and regions remain vulnerable to social, political and economic upheaval.

In many countries, the failure to address the need of poor people as part of a strategy for sustained growth has been a mayor obstacle to reducing poverty.

There are persistent gender gaps in acces to education, employment, and equal remuneration. Women´s poorer access to a better employment is often at the root of their lower status in many societies. No doubt that the status of women has its own definition in every specific cuture and society. Both new and old generations of women must be present in the cultural, economic and social arenas of the societies of all countries today. Is specially important to provide social protection for the old members of society and the governments should therefore make great efforts to design

policies to support our elders instead of looking for ways to cut cost from their social budgets.

The persistence, and even deepening, of various forms of inequality worldwide should not be accepted with equanimity. With the unprecedented wealth and resources, technical expertise, and scientific and medical knowledge available in the world today, the most vulnerable society cannot continue to be left so far behind. Macroeconomic, ,financial globalization and changes in labour market institutions cannot be disconnected from the struggle to achieve social development, equalityy and social justice. The failure to pursue a comprehensive, integrated approach to development will perpetuate the inequality predicament, for which everyone pays the price. (10)

Once Alí a.s. came out of Zayd bn Wahab house and there were patches sewn to his dress.Bn-Noaja, who was and enemy, taunted Alí (a.s.) on the very poor and coarse kind of dress put on by him. He replied: (11)

"*Let go, what have you to find objections in my dress, it is the kind which our masses can afford, why can you not think of their lives and dresses, I shall improve my standard after I have succeeded in improving theirs. I shall continue to live like them. Such kind of dress makes one feed humble and meek and give up vanity, haughtiness and arrogance".*

In the midst of this chaotic and unhappy world,, men, have a unique chance to divest themselves from egoistic feelings that divide and confront different societies. Men have the chance to reject materialism and its effect of consumerism that blocks the way to light and wisdom. The apostle Matthew tell us what Jesus of Nazareth said about storing material things:(12)

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth or decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be."

V.- WHAT CAN I PERSONALLY DO AND HOW ARE THE MAN AND WOMAN THAT ARE WORKING FOR HIS APPEARANCE?

They are apparently normal men and women, albeit with vision, values and principles, and an extraordinary capacity for action. They are people who have understood that at this point in time there are two mutually exclusive life options: one is to remain passive awaiting what will happen, or to devote one's knowledge and energy to human transformation, assuming that what is new and superior will develop and consolidate in the years and decades to come, as far as more and more people, individuals and groups are conscious, troughout the world, of the appearance of the Mahdi (a.s) and openly express their intention of working for His manifestation.

The work has to be done as a group and not individually or alone, but any individual expression will be taken into consideration and will be essential and complementary to the whole. They will evolve individually but their work will be done in open and participative mixed interdisciplinary groups. They are patient and persevering in fulfilling their aims and their action will focus on obtaining constructive results.

They will be capable of confronting challenges that others elude, they will remain there where others disappear; and they will disappear where others struggle to be and show themselves off.

They will make decisions that others avoid because their decisions are not based on what is seen only but in what is expected to be. Faith is to believe what you do not see but your are certain that exist and. They will be precursors of new social objectives and new ways of transcending adverse realities and they will be capable of acting with total effectiveness in moments of continuous and traumatic changes.

They will be capable of confronting great challenges and they will run risks in direct opposition to those who will desire

to maintain the obsolete" status quo" and are oppose to social evolution and transformation; those who promote chaos for the purpose of paralyzing man´s path to wisdom. They will do all this without hesitation or without falling into violence; rather, thanks to the spiritual strength that comes to them from the original source, the strength that generates the appearance of the Mahdi (a.s.).

VI.-THE APPEARANCE OF THE MAHDI (A.S.) WILL BRING A BRIGHT AND NEW WORLD ORDER

The Mahdi (a.s.), in his appearance, will use any channel to expand the consciousness of men and achieve their correct spiritual orientation. He will enlighten the minds of men, bringing them closer to true knowledge, teaching them the way to transform knowledge into wisdom and understanding. He will teach us to distinguish between false mirages or illusions and true reality; that reality that fills our souls with peace.

The education of the masses, awakening their individual consciousness and strengthening their capacity for solidarity and tolerance. The Mahdi (a.s.) will make brotherhood possible between men through the establishment of new values in life the proper use of words and good aspirations and thinking in order to achieve closeness to God and the advent of God´s Kingdom.

He will assure an intelligent fulfilment of the social and economic policies of States, eliminating social injustice and social differences that divides societies into rich and poor; privileged and underprivileged people. There will only be a single social model and it shall be ruled by truth, not by lies. Freedom, justice and solidarity among the peoples of the earth will shine forth.

He personifies justice and freedom for all men. His appearance will unite and bind all men of good faith in the world without distinction of race or origin. His appearance will inspire the desire to serve humanity. By the strength of His

divine presence, He will raise in the hearts of men the desire for a more sincere and profound rapprochement to the other, whether near or far. A new spiritual aperture that will make a vision of reality closer to the world of causes passing from rational darkness to spiritual enlightenment.

He will elevate the dignity of human beings through justice, destroying favouritism and corruption in applying justice, and he will fight against the oppressive political classes and the judges who violated the law. He will provide a fair justice to all as a fundamental right of all human beings. Socrates once said that it was better to suffer injustice than to inflict it on another human being.

The restoration of human dignity shall be one of the fundamental focal points in the actions of the awaited Mahdi (a.s.). Man cannot live without dignity. It is as the air he breaths, it is the source of all the other virtues. If he is despoiled of dignity, he is emptied of human content, and from this emptiness he may be manipulated and used by those governors, politicians or businessmen whose sole purpose in life is to use persons for their own profit and accumulation of power.

The best model of dignity and virtue as a ruler and stateman can be found in the following passages about Imam Ali (a.s)

Ali (a.s) hated bloodshed, did not believe in imperialism, and had no faith in propagation of religion with sword in one hand and the Quraan in the other. He believed Islam to be a message of Peace and Love and wanted mankind to be ruled on the basis of equity and justice".

"Once one of his favourite and trusty companion, Othmann bn Kaneefa, told him:

Look my Lord, these are the reasons why influential and rich Arabs are deserting you and are gathering around Moaawiya. Of what use these persons, disable, aged widows and Negro slaves are to you. How can they help and serve you?".

He replied: (13)

"I cannot allow rich and influential persons to exploit the society of this Moslims state and to run an enequitable and unjust system of distribution of wealth and opportunities. I cannot for a moment tolerate this. This is a public wealth, it comes from the masses it mut go back to them. The rich and the powerful persons have not created any wealth, they have merely sucked it from the masses and after paying the taxes, etclk what is left to they is many times more that what they pay to the state and they are welcome to retain it. Had all this been private property. I would have gladly distributed it in the same manner. So far as their desertion is concern I am glad they have deserted me. So far as the usefulness or services of these disabled persons and have-nots is concerned, remember that I am not helping them to secure their services, I fully well know they are unable to serve me. I help them because they cannot help themselves and they are ass much human-beings as you and I. May God help me to do my duty as He wishes me to do (Kitaab al-Gharaa)"

He will teach us not to hate our enemy but to fight the evil that is in oneself. His appearance will favour the expansion of human consciousness in such a way that we will be able to understand everything that has been hidden to us in the past . It will reinforce our capacity for perception and intuition so that we can awake from all the mirages and false illusions of the material world to which we are subject. Our eyes will open to a more perfect and clearer reality.

The dense, negative thinking that confuses us, fruit of our emotional distortion, our not knowing exactly what we want and, above all, not knowing why we want it, will disappear. We will stop feeling like leaves moved by the wind to become firm and straight trees that raise their branches to the sky without fear and with an infinite confidence in themselves. The things we desire shall be those that are good for us because we shall know them because events will take place inside of us before they manifest in the material world around us. The things that happen today or tomorrow will not surprise us because we

shall be attentive to what happens inside ourselves, we will not be confuse and desperate about our present or future events.

VII.- CONCLUSION

The Avatar or Messiah, the Mahdi (a.s.) will bring light and, above all, will bring love and life, because love is the foundation of life. It is necessary for us to become familiar with these facts and make them known to all people we may get into contact in our life.

That the time for His appearance is now.

That He is already acting in the hearts and minds of many human beings and that He should be evoked if we acknowledge and believe that He will appear between us soon.

That His appearence has been announced and foretold in all the Sacred Texts and Holy Scriptures of the world.

That the true preparation for His appearance requires from us to deeply work for peace and to urgently create bridges for an inter-religious dialogue of peace and understanding with all religions of the world and the participation of representatives of governments of all States.

The actual United Nations could be the frame for this proposal, but unfortunately is not at its best moment.At the moment need a deep transformation.

All the necessary steps have to be taken without delay towards that direction if we want to hasten His appearance.

The Mahdi (a.s) will unify East and West, North and South. In His appearance, he will bring, love, light and wisdom. All eyes will see Him, all ears will hear Him, and His voice shall be as the thunder that is heard before the rain, a thunder of love, light and wisdom. Rain that He will pour forth for all men on earth, without distinction of race or colour of skin. His love for humanity knows no limits.

Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in the birthday anniversary oft Ali (a.s.) last tuesday, described the "Commander of the Faithful" as the shining star in the firmament of justice and humanity, calling him the prominent figure revered by the world´s freemen.

The honorable Leader reiterated*: (14) "Today the most important duty of the Islamic Ummah is Jihad in the path of Allah and efforts to revive the Muslim's self-steem and their moral, humanitarian and scientific sublimity."*

One of Imam Ali (a.s.) most enlighted sermon is number 42 (Nahjol-Balaagha/Sermons): (15)

He says:

" O people what I fear most about you are two things – acting according to desires and extending hopes. As regards acting according to desires, this prevents from truth; and as regards extending of hopes, it makes one to forget the next world. You should know this world is moving rapidly (and cycle of worldly enjoyments would end soon) and nothing has remain out of it except last particles like the dregs of a vessel which has been emptied by someone. Beware, the next world is advancing, and either of them has sons "You also must be prepare, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."i.e. followers. You should become sons of the next world because on the Day of Judgment every son would cling to his mother. Today is the Day of action and there is no reckoning while tomorrow is the Day of reckoning but there would be no (opportunity for) action."

I believe we are living nowadays in the "Day of Action" and the "Day of Reckoning" will come to us soon with the appearance of the Mahdi (a.s.), the Saviour of Mankind. He shall appear in near future to guide the deviant world to the right path, rectify all faults, and purify the world from all evil.

One of the important reasons for His appearance is that the work of his followers in all countries is been done; is duly accomplished. This is unfortunately not the actual situation. His appearance depends to a high extent on the correct human relationship around the world. We all know that His hour is near because of the needs of the people in every country and because of the invocative cry of the masses everywhere.

We do not know the date or the hour of the appearance of the Mahdi (a.s.) but as truth believers in His appearance we

have to accomplish without rest our duties soon to hasten his appearance.

The Apostle Luke advise as to be prepare for the appearance: (16)

"You also must be prepare, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

Ayyatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei stressed that the belief in the appearance of the Imam Mahdi (a.s.)and cherish hope of a bright future should be combined with vigorous efforts and pious dees in various spheres of activities.

He said: "*A nation that believes in the advent of the Saviour of mankind, the promised Mahdi (may Almighty Allah hasten his appearance) , will never feel weak. This nation will endure hardships and pressures and follow the path to progress and dignity with perseverance and strength."(17)*

Let us whisper together: "O´, My Lord (Ya Mahdi) your occultation seized sleep of my eye and made narrow my bed. It also is taken away may ease of heart. O God, do not appoint us a false pretender of his awaiting and grand us merit to make all preparation for his appearance". (18)

I wish to end with a beautiful words of the Holy Profet (a.s.) to Imam Ali (a.s.) on Sunday 27th of Safar: (19)

"Ali you will be first to meet me on the fountain of Kawther. After me when hardship and reverses face you then do not lose patience and when you find people running after worldly gains then you busy yourself in the way of truth and God."

May Almighty Allah increase the followers of His true path"

NOTES:

(1)John, I 8, New Testament, New American Bible, Washington DC.

(2)Bahavad Gita, Book IV, aforims 7 and 8.

(3)Glimpses of the Naj Al-Balaghah, Martyr Murtada Mutahhari,,

part IV, government and justice, p.139.
(4)Luke 12 (22-26), New Testament, The New American Bible, Washington DC.
(5)De Lubac, Henry, El drama del humanismo ateo, Ediciones Encuentro, 1990, Madrid, p 48.
(6)Berdiaev, Nicolás, Le nouveau moyen age, p.21,Cf., Henry de Lubac, Op.cit. p.47.
(7)Thibon, Gustave, L' échelle de Jacob, p. 178, Cf., Henry de Lubac, Op.ci. p. 49.
(8)Jahangir, Asma, special representative, United Nations, Religious Intolerance Report 2004, E/CN.4/2006/5.
(9)HRW World Report 2005 (events 2004).
(10)World Social Situation Report 2005, United Nations.
(11) Imam Ali (a.s.) Nahjol-Balagha, Peak of Eloquence, compiled by Sayyid Shareef ar-Razi, Ansariyan Publications, Qum (IRI), p.30.
(12)Matthew 6 (19-21), New Testament, New American Bible,Washington DC.
(13)HRW, World Report 2005 (events 2004) Religious and the human rights movement.
(14)Imam Ali (a.s.), Nahjol-Balagha, Op.cit., p 79.
(15)Info-Shiawomen org., Leader´s speech, August 9th 2006.
(16)Imam Ali (a.s.) Nahjol-Balagha, Op.cit., Sermon 42, p 200.
(17)Luke 12, 40, New Testament, New American Bible, Washington ,DC.
(18)Info-Shiawomen org., Leaders´s speech, Setpember 24th 2005.
(19)Info-Shiawomen org., April 26th 2005 , Prayer of Imam Ja´afar al-Sadik (a.s.).
(20) Imam Ali (a.s.) Nahjol-Balagha, Op.ct., p.55.

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Messianic Hope in Biblical Eschatology

David W. Shenk, Ph.D.

"What will Jesus the Messiah do, when he returns the second time?" the leader of the Germantown Mosque in Philadelphia in the USA asked a group of Christians who were guests for the evening *salat*.

"The Messiah will bring to fulfillment the kingdom of God," I responded. "Signs of the kingdom are present within the faithful churches that gather in worship with the commitment to continue the ministries that the Messiah began when on earth. For glimpses of the eschaton when the Messiah returns, welcome to visit our churches."

Our Muslim friends accepted the invitation, and spent a weekend in our homes and churches to see signs of the eschaton.

Both Muslims and Christians believe in a second coming of Jesus the Messiah. Although there are differences in Muslim and Christian understandings as to what his appearance will mean, both communities believe the second coming relates to the intention of God to extend his kingdom of justice and truth throughout the world.

The President of Iran, Mahmood Ahmadi-Nejad, in his May 8, 2006 letter to USA President George W. Bush, refers to this common Christian and Muslim expectation for the second coming of the Messiah. He writes, "Will we be given a role to play in the promised world where justice will become universal and Jesus Christ (PBUH) will be present? Will they (the prophets) even accept us?"[69]

[69] Mahmood Ahmadi-Nejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Letter to Mr. George Bush, President of the United States of America, 5/8/2006.

Hope is a Central Theme in the Torah

Eschatological hope permeates the biblical scriptures and is at the core of the Christian faith. God planted the seed of that hope within humanity at the beginning of human history.

God's Promise to Adam and Eve

In the Torah account Adam and Eve turned away from God by disobediently taking fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What is the meaning of the tree? Probably one meaning is giving nature (creation) ultimate authority. That is the essence of nature worship and polytheism. In these modern times, the tree might be considered science, as in Marxism where dialectical materialism was the ultimate authority. The tree is giving ultimate loyalty to that which is other than God. The consequence is alienation and death. [70]

Adam and Eve were smitten with shame and sought to hide from God by hiding in the bushes in the garden where God had placed them at the time of their creation. God did not abandon them and met them in the garden hiding. God described the consequence of their decision to reject him. They would experience alienation in their work, with creation, from one another, between mother and children, and from God. They would experience death; in fact murder invaded their family; their first-born son, Cain, killed the brother, Abel.

In this context of rebellion, alienation and death God addressed the serpent, who is the representation of rebellion against God, saying, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15). This is a promise that a Son born to woman will confront and triumph over evil but be wounded in the battle. A stream of Protestant and Catholic theology believe this promise is the beginning of biblical messianic eschatological hope.[71]

Abraham: A Blessing to All Nations

It is with Abraham that God's promise of hope is established. God called Abraham, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household..." (Genesis 12:1). The significance of

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[70] Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 64 - 79.

[71] C. K. Leaman, Biblical Theology: *Old Testament, Vol 1* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1971) 65.

this journey of transformation is especially evident when comparing Abraham's saga with all other religious practices of the ancient Middle East.[72] The peoples Abraham left worshipped nature gods including the moon, with sexual fertility cults at the heart of their worship practices. Abraham left all of that to worship and follow Elohim (Arabic: Allah), God almighty, the one and only Creator of the heavens and the earth.

God's call to Abraham also included an astonishing promise.

I will make you into a great nation
And I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
And you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
And whoever curses you I will curse;
And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you!
(Genesis 12:2-3)

All gods of the nations empowered their devotees to oppress others. However, God's call to Abraham turns such notions upside down. The God of Abraham empowered Abraham and his seed, not to oppress others, but rather to bless all nations. Indeed Abraham's sojourn was a blessing to the nations among whom he moved. God made an irrevocable covenant with Abraham that his seed will become many nations, and that the seed of Abraham will bless all nations. (Genesis 17:3-7).

God blessed Abraham with two sons, Ishmael and Isaac; the birth of Isaac to 90-year-old Sarah was a complete surprise. That is the nature of the reign of God, which breaks into our experience graciously and surprisingly. Abraham experienced injustice, as for example, when Sarah died the local inhabitants of Canaan charged him an exorbitant price for a field wherein he could bury his wife.[73] He did not retaliate. He did not use violence to acquire the blessing of God including the promise of land; likewise the reign of God is not extended

[72] William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, (New York: Doubleday, 1957).

[73] The New International Version Study Bible, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), footnote 23:15, page 39.

violently, but rather graciously, and we receive the blessings of the reign of God voluntarily. Abraham demonstrated this by being a good neighbor!

Moses: Deliverance and Justice

Later the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and his son Jacob were known as Israel, meaning "Let God rule."[74] Because of famine in Canaan they migrated to Egypt where they lived for 430 years and became a great nation of about 2.5 million people (Exodus 12:37-40). Pharaoh enslaved the people, and Moses, who had been adopted into Pharaoh's family, became angry because of the oppression of his people. In rage he killed one of the slave drivers, and as a consequence had to escape. He lived in Midian as a shepherd for many years.

That incident revealed to Moses that violence against those who inflicted injustice only created threats of counter violence. In time God would intervene to deliver Israel from bondage, but that deliverance would not come about through Moses leading a violent revolution against Pharaoh.[75] The Torah reveals God proclaiming, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay." (Deuteronomy 32:35). When people engage in violence in order to overcome oppression, usually the consequence is a cycle of violent retribution. It is God who brings about true deliverance and justice. Later we shall see that the nature of messianic eschatological hope is that God, not humanity, bring to fulfillment the reign of peace among the nations.

It was to bring deliverance from oppression and injustice that God met Moses in the burning bush in the desert of Midian where he was tending sheep. In that encounter God was initiating a movement for justice and freedom of an oppressed people. Biblical theologians refer to God meeting Moses in the burning bush as I – Thou encounter.[76] God encountered Moses, and in that encounter called Moses into a mission for freedom from oppression, much like he called Abraham five hundred years earlier into a mission to bless all nations.

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[74] John D. Davis and revised by Henry Snyder Gehman, *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1944), 273.

[75] Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior*, (Scottdale; Herald Press, 1980), 60-64.

[76] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970)

As Moses approached the burning bush the Lord God proclaimed, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people....I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them...." (Exodus 3:7).

Subsequent to the burning bush encounter, Moses returned to the land of Pharaoh and, with his brother Aaron, they confront Pharaoh declaring, "This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me!" Pharaoh resisted, and God confronted the land with a sequence of ten plagues. Finally Pharaoh acquiesced and Israel left the land where they had lived for over 400 years.

The Covenant at Mount Sinai and Jubilee

After Israel left in freedom, they encamped at Mount Sinai where God established his covenant with them. Themes that were present in God's covenant with Abraham were reasserted in the covenant of Mount Sinai. The worship of only the true creator God was at the center of the covenant, as expressed in the Shema, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5).

The commitment to worship only the Lord God was to be expressed in righteousness and justice, in love for one's neighbor. They were never to forget that they had been slaves, but God delivered them. Therefore they were to care for the fatherless, the aliens, and the poor. Even animals were to be treated justly. For example, the oxen were to be free to eat all the grain they wanted when they were working in the grain. The covenant community was to be a community of salaam, wellbeing.

The commitment to justice and well-being was institutionalized in the Year of Jubilee, which happened every 50 years. On the Day of Atonement when they offered sacrifices to God and gave thanks for the forgiveness of sins, the priests blew the ram's horn and proclaimed the Year of Jubilee. The term, Jubilee, comes from the Hebrew word, *Yobel,* meaning ram's horn.

What happened in that Jubilee year? First, they proclaimed forgiveness of sins; they offered animal sacrifices in their prayers for forgiveness. Second, they rested from work; even the land rested from farming. This was a commitment to care for God's good earth. Third, they freed their slaves. Fourth, they forgave debts. Fifth, they returned all land to the original owners that had been bought during the past fifty years. Jubilee was a celebration where those who were oppressed by debt or enslavement were freed from those burdens (Leviticus 25, 8 – 43; 27:17 – 25). We do not know whether Israel ever fully practiced Jubilee. However the principles of freedom for the captives and hope for the poor permeated the Law of Moses.

Jubilee was the inspiration for churches throughout the world pleading with governments and banking interests to make the year 2,000 a Jubilee year for the forgiveness of the debts of poor nations. That call was heard by many of the wealthy governments, and debts were forgiven for some nations struggling with debt burdens. Tanzania was my boyhood home. For many years Tanzania struggled with debts they could not pay. However, those debts were forgiven in the 2,000 Jubilee, and that brought new hope to the Tanzanian people.

We emphasize the Jubilee dimension of the Mosaic Law, for Biblical messianic hope is rooted in the conviction that the Lord God came down to deliver the covenant people form slavery under Pharaoh and met them at Mount Sinai with the command to be a people of Jubilee. Later I will explore ways that Jubilee was fulfilled in the ministries of the Messiah and explore the significance of Jubilee in understanding Biblical eschatological messianic hope.

The Monarchy and Exile -- Messianic Hope

After God established the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, the people began forty years of wandering through the deserts until they eventually began the occupation of Canaan. Within 500 years of the Covenant at Sinai, they were well established in Canaan. They formed a monarchy, much like other nations. They expected that as a settled people with a monarchy, they would be in a position to receive the blessings

of God and fulfill the promise of God to Abraham of being a blessing to all nations. In that hope during the reign of Solomon, they built the Temple for the worship of God.

Monarchy and Temple: Is this Jubilee?

Early on when the monarchy was being established, Nathan, a prophet of God, approached King David, who was the second king. Saul was the first king. Nathan proclaimed, "The Lord declares to you that....your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:11, 16). David was astonished! After that promise the Biblical scriptures affirmed repeatedly that the Messianic ruler would come of David's line. This is why the Messiah is often referred to as the Son of David.

Especially under King Solomon, who was David's son, the monarchy and the temple system became amazing, with so much wealth in Jerusalem that silver was considered only like stones (1 Kings 10:27). When Solomon dedicated the temple they offered 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats as sacrifices to God. People came from afar to see Solomon's splendor and hear his wisdom.

However, all of this was at tremendous cost. The monarchy and temple system became a heavy burden. After Solomon's death the nation divided with a Northern Kingdom (Israel) and a Southern Kingdom (Judah). Often the kings departed from God and the ways of peace and justice. Solomon, had a thousand wives and concubines, most of whom he married to solidify political alliances. He began to worship the gods of the wives he had married! The temple system and the monarchy did not assure that Israel would live in obedience to the covenant and the principles of Jubilee.

Some of the kings did horribly unjust things. For example, King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, arranged for the murder of Naboth because Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard. Instead of being a blessing to the nations Israel became involved in extensive wars. Often they fought the local inhabitants of Canaan such as the Philistines, and very frequently fought and occupied surrounding nations as well. Some of these wars were cataclysmic leaving hundreds of thousands dead. This was

quite different than the vision of Jubilee and blessing to the nations.[77]

There were times of repentance and submission to God. For example, under King Hezekiah they destroyed the centers of idolatry and returned to the ways of justice and peace. However, on the whole the Temple and monarchy departed from the call of God to be faithful and just. Consequently the prophets became increasingly forthright in proclaiming that the monarchy and temple system were not the fulfillment of Jubilee and the promise of blessing to the nations.[78]

The Prophet Amos declared,

I (the Lord) hate, I despise your religious feasts;
I cannot stand your assemblies.
But let justice roll on like a river,
Righteousness like a never-failing stream
(Amos 5:21-24)

In regards to the religious fasts, God spoke through the Prophet Isaiah saying,

Is not this kind of fasting I have chosen:
To loose the chains of injustice
And untie the cords of the yoke,
To set the oppressed free
And break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
And to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
When you see the naked to clothe him,... (Isaiah 58:6-7)?

The Exile: Blessing to the Nations as Suffering Servant

The Assyrians took the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity in 722 B.C. Then the Davidic monarchy over Judah in the Southern Kingdom ended in 586 B.C. The Temple was destroyed when the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon overwhelmed Jerusalem. All of Israel, except for the poorest, was taken to Babylon as forced refugees. Seventy years later, under the Persian King Cyrus, some returned to their homes to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. But the Davidic monarchy was never restored.

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[77] Lind, 114-145.

[78] John Bright, *The Kingdom of God, The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church,* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 98-126.

The people believed that the reason for this calamity was because, "...they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).

The 70 years of the Exile was overwhelming for Israel. They were refugees in strange lands with no king and no temple. t was during this time that Messianic hope flourished. Also Israel gained new understandings of what it meant to be the covenant people of God. As the prophets saw the coming end of the monarchy, or prophesied during the Exile, they exhorted the people with the promise of the coming Messiah, who would inaugurate peace and justice among the nations. Here are two of these prophesies, both proclaimed over the time when the Northern Kingdom was facing dispersion as the Assyrians were relentlessly attacking them.

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed,

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse (He is the father of David. This refers to the promise that a son of David will rule forever.)

From his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and power,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—
And he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
Or decide by what he hears with his ears;
But with righteousness he will judge the needy,
With justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
With the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked,
Righteousness will be his belt
And faithfulness the sash around his waist....
They will neither hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples;

The nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious
(Isaiah 11:1- 5; 9 - 10).

The Prophet Micah encouraged the people with this Messianic expectation.

He will judge between many peoples
And will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
Nor will they train for war anymore.
Every man will sit under his own vine
And under his own fig tree,
And no one will make them afraid,
For the Lord Almighty has spoken
(Micah 4:3 - 4).

As the Exile continued, there was a deepening awareness that the people of the covenant were called to be a blessing to the nations within their experience of exile.[79] Although scattered in nations far from their homeland, God promised, "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). Is it possible that Israel in Diaspora with no political or military power and no territorial possession were more fruitful in their calling to be a blessing and light to the nations, than was true when they were an independent monarchy occupying the land of Canaan with the Temple system as the center of their worship?

In their suffering, God revealed that they were called to be God's Suffering Servant, and in the ministry of suffering be a healing witness among the nations.[80] This is a complete revolution in theological thought—that in suffering the kingdom of God prevails! In later centuries the church saw this vision of the Suffering Servant as a prophetic anticipation of the Messiah and his sufferings. A prophet of the Exile proclaimed in regard to the Suffering Servant, "But he was pierced for our

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[79] Bright, 127 155.
[80] Bright, 148 153.

transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

The Ministry of the Messiah

After 70 years in Exile, some of Israel was permitted to return to Canaan. Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah they rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem. At the time when the Messiah was born, 500,000 lived in the regions around Jerusalem, and 3.5 million were in Diaspora, scattered among the nations.[81] Messianic expectation became very intense. All believed that the Messiah born of David's line would come soon and establish God's eternal kingdom.

It is in that context that Jesus the Messiah is born to the Virgin Mary. His birth was surprisingly unobtrusive; the Gospel describes his first bed as a manger in a cattle stall. When King Herod sought to take his life, the young child became a refugee in Egypt. In his youth and young adulthood he worked as a carpenter in Nazareth.

The Presence of Jubilee

At the age of 30 he commenced his public ministry. On the Sabbath day, as was his custom, he went to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. The leader gave him a scroll to read from, and he read from the Prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
Because he has anointed me
To preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
And recovery of sight for the blind,
To release the oppressed,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
(Luke 4:18 – 19).

Then he sat down and preached his first sermon. It was one sentence, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). The congregation was astonished. They believed that this prophecy is about Jubilee that will be fulfilled

[81] Kraybill, 66.

when the Messiah comes![82] In his one sentence sermon Jesus was announcing that he is indeed the Messiah and that in his mission the kingdom of God (Jubilee) was fulfilled. The people were delighted!

Then the mood turned angry, because Jesus said that outsiders like the Syrians would enter the kingdom more readily than the people in the synagogue. The worshippers that Sabbath morning considered themselves to be very righteous and religions. They were infuriated when Jesus warned that people they considered to be outsiders would enter the kingdom while they would remain outside because of their lack of faith. In fury they tried to throw Jesus over a cliff.

Thus began the public ministry of Jesus the Messiah. In all he said and did, he demonstrated the fulfillment of Jubilee; his life and ministry was the revelation of the presence of the kingdom of God among us.[83] All who were sick, crippled, blind, or deaf, who came to him, he healed. He cast out demons. He fed the hungry miraculously, as when he broke and multiplied five loaves of bread and two fish feeding 5,000 men plus women and children. He raised at least two people from the dead. He triumphed over creation, even walking on the water when it was necessary.

The Messiah welcomed sinners and those who were troubled into his community of followers. He invited, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

The Messiah taught with authority and confronted injustice and religious hypocrisy. He proclaimed, "Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisees! (They were religious leaders.) First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean" (Matthew 23:25-26).

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[82] Donald Kraybill, The Upside Down Kingdom, (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1978), 104-105.

[83] John H. Yoder, *The Original Revolution,* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1972),13-18.

In his Sermon on the Mount the Messiah described the ethical foundation for the kingdom of God. Recall the blessing of God upon Abraham; here Jesus describes the ethical qualities that are essential to authentic blessing.[84]

Blessed are the poor in spirit
For theirs is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are those who mourn,
For they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
For they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
For they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven
(Matthew 5:3-10).

Jesus also elaborated on sexual ethics, marriage, integrity, our attitude toward wealth and possessions, forgiveness of our enemies, reconciliation, giving to the poor, prayer, fasting, and not to worry! The people observed that "...he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:29).

The Suffering Servant

The revolutionary nature of the Messianic age as inaugurated by Jesus is especially revealed in the final weeks of his earthly ministry. I acknowledge that there is some diversity with Islamic understandings. I am grateful for the invitation of the planners of this conference to speak on Messianic eschatology, recognizing that there are may be differences in understandings.

[84] Yoder, 34-52.

At the height of his popularity the Galileans attempted to make him their king by force. At that time there was an insurgency in Galilee against the pagan Roman occupation. The plan of the Galileans was that Jesus would lead their underground army to victory. In Galilee the Messiah could establish the kingdom of God and then extend its borders to the ends of the world.

Jesus the Messiah rejected that invitation forthrightly. Instead he went into the mountains for prayer that night, and thereafter he "resolutely" set his face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He explained to his disciples that in Jerusalem, they would arrest him, "mock him, insult him, spit on him and kill him. On the third day he would rise again" (Luke 18:32-33). The disciples objected strongly. They believed that the Messiah could not be crucified!

As Jesus approached the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, he mounted a colt. The children were jubilant, and sang, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest" (Luke 19:38)! The children sang because they were acquainted with a prophecy written by Zechariah 500 years earlier.

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
Righteous and having salvation,
Gentle and riding on a donkey,
On a colt, the foal of a donkey.
I will take away the chariots from Ephraim,
And the war horses from Jerusalem,
And the battle bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
And from the River to the ends of the earth.
(Zechariah 9:9-10).

Zechariah proclaimed that the kingdom inaugurated by the Messiah would extend among the nations to the ends of the earth. The instruments of war are put away, for this kingdom of peace is voluntarily received. As Jesus the Messiah came

over the brow of the Mount of Olives and saw Jerusalem below, he wept, for Jerusalem would not receive the peace.

Jesus then descended the Mount and entered the Temple with his army of singing children, and chased away the corrupt merchants who occupied the Temple courts.[85] The Temple was the center of worship, where Israel made regular pilgrimages. Eighteen thousand priests and associates were required to keep the system working, and the whole religious enterprise had become a heavy burden. Jesus not only cleansed the Temple, but made it clear that the Temple would one day be destroyed. (That happened about thirty years later.) There was no need for the Temple in the kingdom he was inaugurating, for the people of God would be the temple of God.

The authorities were furious, and planned his arrest. One of his disciples, Judas, turned traitor and decided to co-operate with the authorities. The night of his betrayal by Judas, Jesus had a last supper with his twelve disciples. At that supper Jesus made it clear that Judas would betray him. Then he got up from the table, took a basin of water and towel, and proceeded to wash the feet of each disciple, beginning, it seems, with Judas. The Messiah washed the feet of his betrayer!

Later that night Jesus was in prayer on the Mount of Olives, when Judas and soldiers came to arrest him. One of the disciples, Peter, took a sword and struck one of the arresting team cutting off his ear. Jesus rebuked Peter saying, "Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Jesus touched and healed the stricken ear.

Many accusations were made in his trial. The charges about his cleansing the Temple and predicating its destruction were among the most damaging. He was condemned to be crucified. The Messiah said that he could muster an army of 72,000 angels to deliver him, but he would not.

The next morning Jesus was placed on a cross between two thieves. The Roman authorities put this inscription in three

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[85] Kraybill, 175-78.

languages above his head: This is Jesus the King of the Jews. People jeered, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself" (Luke 23:37). Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Christians believe that in that cry of forgiveness with hands outstretched the soul of the kingdom of God is revealed. Outstretched hands seek to embrace; in the crucifixion of the Messiah, Christians believe we experience the embrace of God that invites all to come and participate in the forgiveness, reconciliation and peace of his kingdom.[86]

Three days after his crucifixion, God raised the Messiah from the dead. In one of his resurrection appearances he met the disciples and said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit." He also commanded them to proclaim the forgiveness of sin. (John 20:21-22)

Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus met his disciples on a hill in Galilee, and commissioned them, "...Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Then he ascended into heaven. As the astonished disciples were gazing into the heavens, two angels appeared and said to them, "This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). For the next ten days the disciples fasted and prayed in an upper room in Jerusalem. Then on Pentecost day, when Israel celebrated the first fruit of the harvest, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. With the empowerment of the Holy Spirit they became witnesses of the gospel of the kingdom just as Jesus had commissioned them to do.

The Kingdom of God and the Eschaton

We have observed that the church was born within the context of Jesus the Messiah promising to return again. The mission of those who are committed to Jesus the Messiah is to continue living and proclaiming the Jubilee that the Torah of Moses commanded and that Jesus fulfilled in his mission. In his life and teachings Jesus inaugurated Jubilee. The faithful

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[86] Volf, 99-166.

church is a community committed to following Jesus the Messiah. This means a commitment to being a community of Jubilee among the nations.

Prior to his crucifixion and resurrection Jesus explained that a witness among the nations to the suffering and redemptive love of God had eschatological significance. He said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

It is for this reason that the faithful church around the world is often recognized as a community who encourages justice, peacemaking, schools, hospitals, agricultural development, cultural transformation in a humanizing direction, freedom, and ministries of compassion, like Mother Theresa's nuns in Calcutta who minister to the dying in their home for the old and dying. The faithful church is to be a sign of the kingdom among the nations, a sign of the fullness of Jubilee that Jesus inaugurated. (I acknowledge with sorrow that often the church betrays this calling!)

The Second Coming of the Messiah

The faithful church serves as a sign of the kingdom of God with the expectation that Jesus the Messiah will return someday and bring to complete fulfillment the Jubilee that he inaugurated. This is to say that the faithful church is a sign of the end. The faithful followers of the Messiah are called to be a sign among the nations of the Jubilee that Jesus inaugurated and that will be fulfilled throughout the earth in his second coming in the eschaton.

The Apostle John describes the second coming of the Messiah thus, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him;...(Revelation 1:7). This reveals that the kingdom breaks into human experience through the transforming power of the redemptive suffering love revealed in the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah.

In his second coming the Messiah's wrath will also be revealed, just as he expressed anger against injustice during his ministry on earth two thousand years ago. In fact, we read that in his wrath the Messiah will slay the nations with the

sword as he establishes the eternal kingdom. The sword with which he slays the nations is the sword that comes form his mouth. He slays the unjust opponents of the Jubilee with the sword of truth. This is not the sword that severs people's heads; it is the sword that penetrates the inner soul for it is with the word of truth that the Messiah triumphs over his enemies.

The Biblical scriptures reveal that in the messianic eschaton there will be a universal resurrection of the dead. God raised the Messiah from the dead; likewise God will raise all humanity from the dead in that final day. At that time everyone will face the judgment of God.[87] The scriptures say, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (Revelation 20:12).

The Messiah warned that the final judgment is the great divide between those who embrace the way of Jubilee, and those who reject that way. The Messiah likens to goats those who do not serve the poor, oppressed, hungry, thirsty, sick, naked and imprisoned. These goats will be sent into eternal punishment, the just recompense for their selfish rejection of the way of justice. The sheep are those who visit the sick, care for the naked, comfort the prisoners, provide food and water for the hungry and thirsty. They will be invited into the eternal kingdom that God has prepared (Matthew 25:31-46).

President Ahmadi-Nejad in his letter to President Bush rightly comments that the righteous ones will have a role to play in the coming kingdom. The Biblical scriptures reveal the righteous sheep who are invited into the eternal kingdom will reign with the Messiah for ever and ever (Revelation 22:5).

The scriptures refer to a new heaven and a new earth.[88] That will be the final consummation of Jubilee! In the grand conclusion of history, God proclaims, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his

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[87] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God, Christian Eschatology,* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 47-76.

[88]) Moltmann, 257-320.

people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away....I am making everything new" (Revelation 21:3-5).

Conclusion: Your Kingdom Come!

Jesus often went into the hills for a night alone in prayer. So his disciples asked him to teach them to pray. The prayer he taught captures the essence of the Messianic reign in Biblical eschatology.

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name,

Your kingdom come, Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our trespasses As we also have forgiven those who have trespassed against us.

And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.

Islamic Messianism (Mahdiism)

From the Individual Faith to the Social Responsibility

Arif Mulyadi

Introduction

THE IDEA of an expected deliverer, who is to come and humble or destroy the forces of wickedness and establish the rule of justice and equity on earth, is shared by all major religions and traditions of the world. Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam cherish their traditions concerning a Messiah or Savior of a divinely chosen line (Sachedina, 1981: 1; Tabatabai, 2001:212; Amini, 1997:48 53). These religions have usually given happy tidings of his coming, although there naturally certain differences in detail that can be discerned when these teachings are compared carefully.

The term "messianism" in the Islamic context is often used to translate the significant concept of an eschatological figure, the Mahdi, who as the foreordained leader "will rise" to launch a great social transformation in order to end the sufferings of the faithful and the rule of enemies of God and establish His kingdom on earth (Sachedina, 1981). The Islamic doctrine of salvation does not conceive of a man as a sinner who must be saved through spiritual regeneration. The basic emphasis of Islamic salvation lies instead in the historical responsibility of its followers, namely, the establishment of the ideal religio-political community, the *ummah*, with a worldwide membership of all those who believe in God and His revelation through Muhammad.

The seeds of this responsibility are actually sown by the Prophet himself. Muhammad is not only the founder of a new religion, but also a guardian of a new social order.

I. Three Methods of Religious Thought

Here "religious thought" means that form of thought which concerned with any of the problems of a religious nature within a particular religion (Tabatabai, 2001: 89). Of course, the

concept of Mahdiism, includes at religious thought. Undoubtedly, the religious thought, like Mahdiism, have the trustworthy sources.

There are three methods of religious thought in Islam. The Holy Quran in its teachings identify three paths for Muslims to follow in order to understand the goal of religion and the Islamic sciences (*ibid*):

1. the path of the external and formal aspect of religion (*shari'ah*)
2. the path of intellectual understanding
3. the path of spiritual comprehension achieved through sincerity (*ikhlâs*) in obeying God

The first method, according to Tabatabai, implies the acceptance the traditional source from which the formal and external aspect of religion is derived, that is the Holy Quran and the Sunnah, hadith received from the Prophet (s) and his infallible Household (`a). Both of them are an authoritative document and also the basic source for the religious thinking of Islam (*ibid*, 93)

The two, in its formal aspect, speak to all people without providing any demonstration. The Holy Quran, for instance, orders people to accept the principles of faith such as Divine Unity, prophethood, eschatology; it gives them practical injunctions like the daily prayers, fasting, etc.; and at the same time the Holy Quran forbids human to do certain other actions. However, if the Quran, Tabatabai adds, had not provided authority for these orders, it would never have expected man to take on and obey them. Therefore it must be that such simple utterances of the Quran are a path toward the understanding of ultimate religious goals and the comprehension of Islamic sciences. We mention such verbal utterances like "Believe in God and His Prophet" and "Perform the Prayers" as the external or formal aspect of religion (*ibid*, 89).

As for the second method, it provides intellectual demonstrations of the validity of the outer or formal aspect of the Quran, which is a divine revelation, as well as of the definitely established sayings of the Prophet (s) and his infallible Household (`a) (*ibid*, 106).

Tabatabai maintains that intellectual proofs are of two kinds: demonstration (*burhân*) and dialectic (*jadal*). The former is a proof whose premises are true even if they are not observable. This type of thought is called rational thought. The latter is a proof all or some of whose premises are based on observable and certain data.

The Holy Quran has used both these methods. First of all, the Quran commands free investigation and meditation upon the universal principles of the world existence, the general principles of cosmic order, as well as upon more particular orders like the heavens, the stars, the earth, etc. Secondly, the Quran has commanded man to apply dialectical thought, which is usually called theological (*kalâmi*) discussion (*ibid*, 106-107).

By the third method is meant gnostic approach. This method based on knowledge combined with love, rather than fear. It is method for realizing the inner truth of religion rather than remaining satisfied only with its external form and rational thought (*ibid*, 113).

Therefore, regarding the concept of Mahdiism as a part of religious thought, we can approach this by three methods as mentioned above.

I.1 Mahdiism: A Proof from the Formal Aspect

According to theologians, we can prove the concept of Mahdiism and his being from the Holy Quran and Hadith. The Holy Quran does not mention, in fact, the Mahdi in its specific details. Not only the Mahdi, there are so many particular details that are true and authentic and yet have been mentioned in the heavenly book. Concerning the Mahdi and his mission, there are a number of verses in the Holy Quran which, however brief, give tidings about the day when the devout worshippers of God and those who support the true religion and those who are worthy of that blessing will rule the earth in its entirety; and the religion of God, Islam, will become the dominant faith over all other religions (Amini, 1997).

For instance, there are four *ayah*, verses, which indicates the appearance of the promised Mahdi as follows:

1. Sura Anbiyâ (21):105, *For We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance, 'The earth shall be the inheritance of My righteous servants.'*

2. Sura Nûr (24):55, *God has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you successors in the land, even as He made those who were before them successors, and that He will surely establish their religion for them that He has approved for them, and will give them in exchange, after their fear, security: 'They shall serve Me, not associating with Me anything.'*

3. Sura Qasas (28):4, *Yet We desired to be gracious to those that were abased in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors.*

4. Sura Shaff (61):9, *It is He who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may uplift it above every religion, though the unbelievers be averse.*

From all these verses and the likes, according to the theologians, it can be concluded that the world actually look forward to the day when its power and government will be given into the hands of the believers and those worthy of the divine trust to become leaders and lead humankind and its civilization to its perfection. Shortly, these verses actually elucidate the appearance of Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his return) (Amini, 1997; Gulpaygani, 2001).

Certainly, we can also attest the existence of the promised Mahdi through the second source of religious thought, namely, Hadith or prophetic tradition. There are many traditions transmitted from the Prophet (s) and the Imams of the Household of the Prophet (`a), and which identify the Mahdi as belonging to the Household of the Prophet (`a), stating that he is a descendent of Fatimah in the lineage of Husayn and his ninth descendant. They also state that the Prophet's successors (*khulafa*) are twelve in number. These traditions define the general notion and identify its embodiment in the person of the twelfth Imam from among the Imams of the Household of the Prophet. These Hadiths have been narrated in a great number and have been widely known despite the caution observed by the Imams (`a) in raising this issue in

public for the sake of protecting their worthy descendent (the Mahdi) from being assassinated or put to death immediately (Tabatabai, 2001; Sadr, 2001). The Hadiths also state that his rising will enable human society to reach true perfection and the complete realization of spiritual life. In fact, the number of these traditions is not the only criterion for their acceptance. There are other indications verify their validity as well.

Thus the Prophetic tradition mentions the Imams, *khulafa* or *umara'* succeeding him and their number, that there shall be twelve Imams, *khulafa-'* or *umara'*, in accordance with the varying texts of the tradition as transmitted by different chains, occurs in the form of narrations collected by some compilers which form more than 270 narrations taken from the most famous Shiite and Sunni compilations of hadith, including the works of Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his *Musnad*, and al-Hakim in his *Mustadrak `ala al-Sahihayn*.

It should be noted here that Bukhari, who transmits this hadith, was a contemporary of Imam Jawad as well as the Imams al-Hadi and al-Askari, and this is of great significance because it proves that this hadith was recorded from the Prophet (s) before its subject had materialized and before the concept of Twelve Imams had been practically completed. This implies that there exists no ground for the doubt that the transmission of this hadith might lave been influenced by the actual situation of the Twelver (Ithna Ashari) Imamis or was a reflection of it, because forged traditions attributed to the Prophet (s) that are either reflections or justifications of a later event do not go back, in their origin or recording in books of hadith, to a date earlier than that event (Sadr, 2001).

Now, we possess real proof that the above-mentioned tradition historically precedes the Twelve Imams and that it had been recorded in books of hadith before the completion of the Twelver Imami reality, it is possible for us to assert that this hadith is not a reflection of some event, but an expression of a Divine reality by someone who did not speak out of selfish motives.

Here we can present some hadiths from the Companions of the Prophet (s), for instance, verify the existence of the promised Mahdi such as:

1. Sa'îd ibn Musayyib reports from 'Amr ibn 'Uthman ibn 'Affân, who said:

We heard from the Prophet saying: "The Imams after me will be twelve in number, of whom nine will be from the progeny of Husayn. Moreover, the Mahdi of this community will be among us. Anyone who holds on to them after me holds on to the rope of God; and whoever abandons them has abandoned God." (quoted from Amini, 1997)

2. Abû Ayyûb Ansârî says:

I heard the Propeth (s) says: "I am the chief of the Prophets and 'Alî is the chief of the legatees. My two grandsons [Hasan and Husayn] are the best among the descendants. The infallible Imams will come forth among us through Husayn. Moreover the Mahdi of this community is among us." At that time an Arab stood up and asked: "O Prophet of God, how many Imams are there after you?" He replied: "Equal to the number of the apostles of Jesus and the chiefs of the Children of Israel." (*ibid.*)

3. From Hudhayfa, the Prophet (s) declares:

The Imams after me will be equal to the number of tribal chiefs among the Children of Israel. Nine among them will be the descendants of Husayn. The Mahdi of this community is among us. Beware! Truth is with them and they are with truth. Thus be careful of the way you treat them after me." (*ibid*)

In historical reality, actually, the Imams of Twelver Shiite begins with Imam Ali (`a) and terminates in the Mahdi (`a). All of them are the sole rational interpretation of these noble Prophetic traditions (Sadr, 2001).

I.2 Mahdiism: A Proof from the Intellectual nderstanding

To show that an Imam must exist as a proof for the existence of those injunctions and their protection, we firstly have to establish the necessity of the general prophethood. Here we discuss briefly some rational assumptions why human being is need of the Prophets.

(1) A human being has been created in such a way that he cannot run his affairs on his own. He needs the assistance and cooperation of others. In other words, he is created civil and social by nature. Hence, he must act within a society. It is clear that self-interest and survival are the cause of conflict in a social life. Each person in the society is engaged in exerting all his efforts to benefit from limited material resources in order that sometimes, or even usually, each person end up stepping upon each other's rights. It is the point that law is needed to regulate social relations and, finally, conflicts should be resolved without creating chaos and lawlessness.

(2) A human being has been innately endowed with the capacity to perfect himself and attain prosperity.

(3) Since a human being is on his way to perfection, attention to the true meaning of perfection has been made part of natural disposition. Thus, it should be possible for him to attain it, because God does not create anything in vain.

(4) The point that a human is made of body and spirit is well established. He is material through his body, whereas his spirit, though intimately connected with his body, is regarded as belonging to the world of incorporeal beings.

(5) Since human is made of two elements, he is bound to have two kinds of life: this worldly life, related to his body; and the spiritual and contemplative life, related to his soul.

(6) Just as between body and spirit there is a connection and relationship, so there is a perfect connection and relationship between the material and spiritual life. In other words, the quality of life in this world has a direct impact upon the spiritual life and vice versa.

(7) A human being is on the way to perfection and is attentive to the requirements of innate and natural perfection. It is incumbent upon God to provide human being the means to attain the goal so that he is able to distinguish and pursue the path of perfection.

(8) By nature a human being is self-centeed and pursues his own interests. Thus, he efforts to exploit fellow human beings and take advantage of their efforts to serve his ends.

(9) Though he efforts to reach his perfection, he often fails to attain that goal. It is due to his own egosentric desires and

internal emotions overcome his ability to differentiate the straight path. (Amini, 1997: 57-58)

These philosophical assumptions demonstrate that human being need for the law. The law can create order in the society when it fulfills the following conditions:

(1) It has to be comprehensive and effective to cover all spheres of individual as well as collective human entertain.

(2) It should lead to the real prosperity of human beings.

(3) It should be attentive to the well being of the entirety of humanity.

(4) It should lay the foundation of a society based on human virtues and the perfection of humanity.

(5) It should possess the efficiency to protect the people from manipulation and chaos and guarantees the rights of all individuals.

(6) It should alert to the spiritual needs of the people.

(7) It should protect the society from turning away from the right path of humanitarian existence.

(8) The lawgiver of such a system should be well informed about all the crooked and scrupulous aspects of human encounters and should be knowledgeable about all the judgments given at different times and places (*ibid*, 59)

The only law fulfill the abovementioned conditions is the divinely ordained legal system. It is free from every selfish human motive. It is a path toward perfection. The information on this path was revealed to the Prophets in order that they could undertake to call people towards it. In order to perfect to human, the prophets are protected from committing any errors in delivering the divine message to humankind. This is known as *'isma* (infallibility). This quality causes the prophets can call upon people to follow the divine guidance. In addition, it is a rationally derived proposition that no person can expect others to carry out moral and religious directives when he himself does not follow the same. A call to the divine path must be demonstrated by the prophet (*ibid*, 61-63).

So, how about the Imamate?

The same proof can be utilized for the existence of Imamate. That is, whenever the prophet dies, there must be exists in his place someone who can lead the community to those ends.

Just as the prophet, this person must be infallible as well (*ibid*, 64-66). Shortly, the Imamate constitutes the continuation of the Prophethood. It is unwise for God if He does not left a leader to human being after demise the prophets.

I.3 Mahdiism: A Proof from the Gnostic Approach

The concept of Mahdiism can be approached by the Perfect Man theory from Ibn 'Arabi. As we know, Ibn 'Arabi is a well-known Sufi. In his Fusus al-hikam, he explains the Perfect Man.

Ibn 'Arabî considers 'man' on two different levels. The first is the cosmic level. Here 'man' is treated as a cosmic entity. 'Man' on this level is the *Imago Dei*, the Image of God. Here 'man' himself is perfect; 'man' *is* the Perfect Man. The Perfect Man in this sense is 'man' viewed as a perfect epitome of the universe, the very spirit of the whole world of Being, a being summing up and gathering together in himself all the elements that are manifested in the universe. 'Man', in short, the Microcosm. At the second level, vice versa, 'man' means an individual. On this level, not all men are equally perfect. There are, from this viewpoint, a number of degrees among men. And only few of them deserve the appellation of the Perfect Man. The majority of men are far from being 'perfect' (Izutsu, 1983:220)

The 'humanity' of Man on the cosmic level lies in his 'comprehesiveness'. Man, as Microcosmos, contains in himself all the attributes that are found in the universe. God manifests himself in Man in the most perfect way. Man is the Perfect Man because he is the most perfect self-manifestation of the God.

According to Ibn 'Arabi, Man on the cosmic level, or the Perfect Man, is endowed with a perfect 'comprehesiveness'. The Perfect Man shows two characteristics properties which are not shared by anything else. Firstly, he is the only being who is really and fully entitled to be a perfect 'servant' (*'abd*) of God. All other beings do not fully reflect God, because each actualizes only a single Divine Name. The second characteristic feature of the Perfect Man consists in his being *in a certain sense* the Absolute itself (*ibid,* 227). In other

words, the Absolute is the inner reality (*'ayn*) of them, but not vice versa.

As for the Perfect Man on the individual level merely is placed by the special people such as the Apostle (*rasûl*), the Prophet (*nabiy*), and the Saint (*walîy*). In Ibn 'Arabi's understanding, the concept latter comprises both Prophet and Apostle. For him, the Saint is the widest concept comprising Prophet and Apostle; next is the concept of Prophet which comprises that of Apostle; and the Apostle is the narrowest of all. Al-Qashani, a disciple of Ibn 'Arabi, says, 'Every Apostle is a Prophet, and every Prophet is a Saint', but not vice versa (*ibid*, 263).

Ibn 'Arabi views that *waliy* is properly a Divine Name. The fact that *waliy* is one of the Names of God implies that it is an aspect of the Absolute. In this way, the Saint or *waliy* is radically different from the Prophet and the Apostle because the words *nabiy* and *rasûl* are not Divine Names. Since *waliy* is a name common to God and Man, so the *walâyah* never ceases to exist. As God exists everlastingly, the 'saintship' (*walâyah*) will exist forever. As long as there remains in the world even a single man of the highest spiritual power who attains to the rank of *walâyah*—and, in fact, such a man will certainly exist in every age—the *walâyah* itself will be kept intact.

In contrast to this, the prophethood and apostleship are historically conditioned, and can, thus, be intermittent or even disappear completely. For instance, the chain of prophethood has historically come to an end at Muhammad, the last of the authentic Prophets. After Muhammad, there does not exist any longer a Prophet, who is at the same time a Law-giver (*musharri'*). After him, we have 'general prophethood' (*nubuwwah 'âmmah*), namely, prophethood without institution of Law, which us nothing other than 'saintship' (*ibid*, 263-264).

So, if we relate Ibn 'Arabi' theory to the concept of Mahdiism, his theory actually strenghtened the concept of Mahdiism. For instance, Amuli (1989:156-157), one of the comentators of *Fusus al-hikam*, states:

"He (the Mahdi) is the Great Caliph of Allah and the Pole around which the whole world revolves; it is also by him that

wilâyah is sealed and all duties, divine codes of law, spiritual paths and religion are concluded; it is by him that the whole world returns to what is was before it was brought into existence; it is by him that the beginnings of creation are related to the Final Day and by him that the cycle of creation thus comes to an end."

In other passage, Amuli quotes Ibn 'Arabi's word when he divide the subject of *wilâyah* into different sections:

Know that *wilayah* may be divided into absolute and dependent *wilayah*, in other words common *wilayah* and *wilayah* of the elite. If we consider *wilayah* with respect to itself, then it is a divine attribute in an absolute sense; if we consider it as being related to the prophets and the *awliya'*, then it is dependent. Moreover, the dependent is fortified and given validity by the absolute and the absolute finds manifestation in the dependent; thus *wilayah* of all prophets and the *awliya'* is part of the absolute *wilayah*, just as the prophethod of the prophets is part of the absolute prophethood. Since absolute prophethood from the outset is particular to Muhammad and his reality, and this continuation of the original reality particular to the prophets and the messengers from Adam to Jesus (who are in fact different manifestations of the Muhammad reality), so absolute *wilayah* is particular to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and to his reality (by way of the essential and inherited spiritual legacy from pre-eternity) and thereafter (by way of a continuation of the original reality) to his infallible progeny. This spiritual line extends until Allah seals it with the Mahdi. (Amuli, 1989:122)

This passage shows us that Ibn 'Arabi, according to Amuli, basically agree with the promised Mahdi from the Twelver Shia as the Seal of the Saints. That Ibn 'Arabi has claimed himself as the Seal of Saints, it is not a part of this paper.

II. From the Individual Faith to the Social Responsibility

After we prove the concept of Mahdiism from the three methods of religious thinking, which forms the individual faith, now we must consider how change the individual faith to social faith. It is important for us to do this, because during the era of the long occultation, we remains fill this period through

some good deeds. These are called by Mutahhari as the positive awaiting.

Awaiting (*intizar*) is the result of two conditions. Firstly, he is not satisfied with the present circumstances and secondly, he expects the improvement in his circumstances. If either of these conditions are not fulfilled then it is not awaiting and the person concerned is not an 'awaiter' (*muntazir*).

The awaiting of Imam Mahdi also holds the same distinct characteristics. Even here awaiting purport s that an awaiter is not satisfied with his present circumstances and is hoping for a bright and better future.

Merely being discontent with the present circumstances is not sufficient but he must strive to bring change in it. It becomes evident that in such vicious atmosphere and sinful surroundings, what is the responsibility of a true awaiter? And how important it is? There are at least responsibilities as follows:

II.1 Character Building

The foremost thing which a true awaiter is expected to do is to build his character. Character-building implies following the tenets of Islam, developing good traits and purify his self in such a way that every aspect of his personality should reflect the teachings of the Household of the Prophet (`a). Often the friends and helpers of Imam Mahdi afs are described with such superlatives:

"Those who will believe in the hidden Imam they are the most pious ones and their faith is of the highest degree. They will establish prayers and spend generously in the way of God. They believe firmly in Quran and other divine scriptures and they are certain of Qiyamat.' (*Tafsire-Nuruth-Thaqalain*, Vol. 1, Sura Baqarah)

"They are obedient, sincere, honorable, good doers, patient, devout, helpers of the oppressed, cordial and pure-hearted.

"Their hearts are of steel. If they cast a glance at an iron mountain, it will crumble and reduce to bits." (*Ilzamun Naasib*, vol.1, p. 67)

"Their bodies will emit fragrance of musk, while their countenance will be dazzling like a full moon." (*Kamaluddin*, Chap. 24, Tradition No. 11)

"They will be braver than lions and sharper than spears."(*Biharul Anwar*, vol. 52, Chap. 27, Tradition 17)

"They will worship at night." (*Muntakhabul Asrar* section 9, Chap 3, Tradition No.1)

So, whosoever wishes to be among the friends and helpers of Imam Mahdi afs then he must adorn his self with the above mentioned attributes and characteristics.

These excerpts were extracted from various traditions which clarify that in the period of occultation one of our vital responsibilities is to absorb the teachings of the Household of the Prophet (`a) in our character and personality so that we may not wander hither and thither while our beloved Imam (A.S.) is far from our eyes. In such an aimless wandering, it is quite possible that a wanderer may end up getting attached to any mundane caller, because every belief which is not a product of the teachings of the Household of the Prophet (`a) is a clear deviation and every courteousness which does not reflect their mannerisms is intact sheer discourtesy.

It is a proven fact that as much as a man holds Imam (`a) dearer that much he will be attracted towards good deeds and demeanors. And he will cleanse his self from bad habits and vices. Numerous such incidents can he found in the hooks, stories of those persons, particularly youths who felt the love of Imam (`a) in their hearts which changed their entire lives. Undoubtedly, love is such an elixir by which every impossible is made possible.

II.2 The Reformation of Society

One of our important responsibilities in the period of occultation is the reformation of society. The Holy Quran in Sura Asr has suggested a remedy for those who want to remain secure from loss i.e. 'enjoining patience to each other'. Islam is against reclusion and negative ascetism. Rather it advocates a social and public life. The deplorable aspect of the contemporary world is that people want to lead a social life hut due to the fear of society, they do not want to take any

initiative for reformation. The fear of "what the people will say" has displaced the fear of God. Imam Ali Naqi (`a) has extolled the virtues of those who are fulfilling their responsibilities in the period of occultation in the following words-

"Had there not been such scholars in the period of occultation who call the people towards the Household of the Prophet (`a), guide towards them, defend their religion with the proofs of Allah, protect weak Shias from the devilish designs, deception of the tyrants and tentacles of the enemies of Islam, then surely all would have deviated from the religion of Allah. But it is they who are guarding the hearts of the weak Shias like a captain guards the passengers on his ship. They are those who enjoy a supreme position in front of Allah". (Mahajjatul-Baizaa, Vol. 1, Pg. 32)

If they would not reform their society then how would it he known that the whole society is awaiting Imam Mahdi (`a). The following tradition throws light on our responsibilities in the period of occultation:

In the exegesis of the Holy Quran attributed to Imam Hasan Askari (`a), the Holy Prophet (s) has explained the significance of word 'orphan' in the following verse:

"And when we took the covenant from the children of Israil of not worshipping anyone but Allah and goodness to parents and by giving to near ones and orphans." (QS Baqarah [2]: 83).

The Holy Prophet (s) says:

"Allah the Almighty has commanded to do good with the orphans and to act as (a source of) guidance for them. Since they are deprived of their kind and affectionate father. Allah will extend his grace to the one who will have mercy on the orphans. If a person caresses the head of an orphan then as many number of hairs come under his hand those many vast and expansive palatial mansions will be given to him in Paradise. This place will contain all sorts of comforts and luxuries in its precincts... These people will stay in it forever." (*Tafseer* attributed to Imam Hasan Askari (`a), p.239)

Imam Hasan Askari further elucidates the tradition of Holy Prophet (s) in these words:

"There is another orphan whose plight is more pitiful. He is the one who is far from his Imam and cannot have access to him. He who is not aware of his religious obligations. Yes, indeed o' people - one who teaches and trains our far off Shias then he is similar to the guardian of an orphan. Be aware if somebody teaches an ignorant, guides a misguided one, instills the teachings of the Household of the Prophet (`a) then on the Day of Resurrection, he will be with us. We will give him a seat next to us wherever we may be." (*Tafseer* attributed to Imam Hasan Askari (`a), p. 239)

In this period of occultation, when we are separated from our kind Imam (`a) then what else can he the reward of teaching, training, and reforming the society? Where is the teaching and training of society and where is the proximity to the Infallibles Imams (`a) and the fortune of staying with them? This tradition is sufficient to enlighten the keen and sensitive Shias. Even women can join hands with men in fulfilling this responsibility.

It becomes clear after this explanation that a true awaiter never tires of waiting for Imam (`a). He keeps on exerting continuously instead of being a silent spectator. According to me, the existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the manifestation of the active awaiters, which led by Imam Khomeini (q). From this country, the oppressed people over the whole world strive for their independence and liberty from the superpower country. The Islamic Revolution in Iran has inspired millions people to do many things as being of their awaiting to Imam Mahdi (`a). *Ya Mahdi adrikna...*[]

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Mahdism Doctrine and Urbanism

Rethinking Issues of Globalization and Culture in the Future Islamic State of Al-Mahdi (a.s)

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Abstract

The basic concept of Mahdism is that the just ruler and the virtuous awaiting Imam Al-Mahdi (a.s.), the twelfth Imam of Ahlul-Bait (a.s.), will appear in the future -in an unknown time- to fill the earth with justice and equality as it would have been filled with oppression and injustice. At that time, humanity would reach highest levels of integration and amalgamation, so everything would be ideal and perfect in that ideal Islamic state.

The idea of 'filling the earth with justice and equality' suggests a global system and regulations that rules the earth under the tenets of Islam, which could be called as 'Islamic globalization'.

The term 'globalization' refers nowadays to a global system based on the increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through trade and financial flows. It also refers to the movement of people (labour), knowledge (technology) across international borders, in addition to the broader cultural, political, and environmental dimensions. The most dominant fields are the economic and communal globalizations, which are critiqued for encouraging domination, unparalleled growth, and increased inequality, because the strongest gains have been made by the advanced countries only.

In urbanism, globalization refers to the adaptation of urban forms that are out of their native habitats. It has been the material of debate and conflict between urban designers in the last fifty years. It is strongly rejected and critiqued for it's by-products like domination, segregation, placelessness (diminishing importance of place), isolation, and insertion. At the same time, urban designers are in favour of a retrospective view that recognizes the social and cultural dimensions of urban life and maintains the authenticity and identity of place.

This paper discusses globalization phenomenon from the urban design perspective, which is related to social policy. The paper first reviews the literature of urbanism in the historic Islamic cities, and discusses the preliminary arrangements and tools necessary to build the future State of Al-Mahdi (a.s). Then the paper explores issues of globalization and culture, aiming to contribute to this growing literature by bringing together diverse themes to be discussed in conjunction with one another. The main purpose is to establish a new theoretical approach for 'Islamic globalization' in the field of urbanism, and determine the positive issues that could lead to create the right regulations and guidelines for building a perfect Islamic state.

Introduction

The attempt to establish conceptual linkages between urbanism, globalization, and cultural studies on one hand, and Mahdism theory, which is strongly related to Islam, on the other hand, is a critical one. The researcher is responsible to bring out clear discussion of issues of methodology embedded within this type of study. The wrong understanding of Islamic ideals, the difficulty of constructing a clear image of pure Islamic experience from the Islamic history, the ambiguity of some aspects of the Mahdism doctrine; especially for non-Muslims, the bias attitudes of those strongly admiring Western civilization, and the lack of correspondent studies regarding these issues, are all challenges to the researcher.

Moreover, there is the important question of the researcher's position as an insider or outsider in the process of transferals of Islamic ideas and methodologies, "If the method of research and thinking is not an Islamic one or does not, at least, go along with its tendency, the effects will be wrong to unite with the Islamic spirit" (Al-Balagh, 1994). The complicated factors that shaped traditional Islamic cities make it a dilemma to explore them, and establish subtle conception of those factors them, and the main forces that controlled the building process at that time.

This study aims to bring out a discussion of the conflict of the interlocking terminologies of urbanism, globalization, and culture, in relation to Islamic principles and fundamentals. For this purpose, the paper briefly reviews Islamic doctrine in relation to urbanism, the urbanism practice in historic Islamic cities, and how globalization effects has reshaped their urban fabric interconnectedly, in order to reconstruct Islamic urban theory and reconceptualize globalization to develop the notion of 'Islamic globalization'.

Thus, the first section focuses on urbanism experience in the historic Islamic cities, including the economic, social, and political conditions in which they were produced, and the

influences exercised on their production. The second section concentrates on the current issues of urban design and its implications on urbanism in the future Islamic State, particularly recent theories of globalization and culture. The third section tries to address the context of urbanism in the future Islamic cities based on Islamic doctrine, and depict a picture of 'Islamic globalization' in the Islamic State of Al-Mahdi (a.s).

However, it is important to note that this study attempts at analyzing concepts and establishing a broad image of the planning regulations for the state of Imam Al-Mahdi (as). Further studies and extensive researches are essential.

1. Islam and Urbanism

The perfect Islamic state, associated with the appearance of Al-Mahdi (a.s) would not be built from scratch. Current urban fabrics of existent cities are the basis for its construction. This realistic vision requires a pragmatic analysis of the current urban forms. Although future Islamic State of Al-Mahdi (a.s) would conjoin all the cities in the globe together, this study focuses on the specific features of traditional Islamic cities, as they are considered idols and references for many of the researchers in this field.

Before analyzing issues of urbanism in Islamic cities, it is useful to define the term 'urbanism' and its related components, which would emphasize its significance in building our cities.

Urbanism, Meaning and Objectives

Urbanism is defined as "the study of cities; their economic, political, social and cultural environment, and the imprint of all these forces on the built environment" (*Encyclopedia*). Urbanism is about creating human communities and living together. It is about 'quality of life'. It is dynamic, diverse, moving, consistent, aesthetic, and systematic. Urbanism is beyond limits, the urban designer is an artist, ecologist, archaeologist, socialist, scientist, historian, and philosopher.

The word 'urban' refers to the city life, in contrary to rural. Urbanism is a system established to overcome problems of

urban rural areas, and pursue a clear understanding of contemporary living. In the beginning of 20th century, the awareness of urbanism increased in many parts of the world, basis for planning established, and town planning laws and building laws for urban areas were adopted.

Urban design regulations are important to create a new art of city planning that encompasses policies and strategies regarding land use, zoning regulations, urban change, living standards, sustainable use of resources , and economic proficiency, based on the social structure of the city. The essential urban design qualities include; context, accessibility, connectivity, versatility, legibility, compatibility, creativity, choice, and collaboration.

Urbanism of the Historic Islamic Cities

"The most mystical, most religious, most wonderful, they are more ordinary than most things" (Alexander, 1979)

Historic city discourse in the field of urbanism usually associated with the notions of culture (a framework that recognizes social and historical dimensions of urban life), identity (specific characteristics of place), and authenticity. These concepts where invented and adopted as the main focus of a retrospective attitude in the confront with modernity and globalization.

In the case of Islamic historic cities, questions of culture, identity, and authenticity were often misjudged and misunderstood. Orientalism, which is a kind of Western intellectual authority and a style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient within Western culture, has dominated the area. Orientalist's knowledge of Islam was superficial; as a result, some concepts were misunderstood, wrongly chosen or incompletely applied. Orientalism was developed during the colonialism era that represents imbalance of power. However, powerless people had some capacity, this reticulation made the process of sorting and differentiation between authentic and exotic, much more complicated.

The history of traditional Islamic cities regarding urbanism, could be categorized into three phases; the early decades after the expedition of Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w), the following two centuries (Umayyad and Abbasid States), and the colonialism era.

Urbanism in the Early Decades of Islam

First, it is important to note that Islam, the eternal message, has reformed the lives of Islamic societies, and had great impact on the social life. It is a religion of action and a system of life, conveyed to guide humanity, so that people march in its light and build life and culture according to its teachings.

During the early decades of Islam, cities that witnessed remarkable changes were the cities with majority converters to the new religion. The city of Al-Medina was the first city that witnessed changes. Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w), who was the ruler and the highest authority, established the cornerstone for the city of Medina. The most apparent features and policies to build the city were as follows:

- Building a relatively big and central mosque (Masjid), which was a place for administration, and social gathering, in addition to worshipping
- Encouraging people to build their city with respect to each others' rights and with the sustainable use of available resources
- The urban form of the past wasn't rejected, it was developed and improved to correspond to the new requirements
- Collective life was encouraged; people were urged to perform their prayers in the Masjid, and deal with each other as brothers and sisters regardless their roots and social status

However, the time the prophet Mohammed (s.a.w) was going through was very harsh; too many challenges and too many people wanted to stop the new faith and to do so many

plots to injure and kill him. The battles between Muslims and unbelievers dominated their life activities. As a result, Islamic theory and principles didn't come to be fully practiced in urban life.

Urbanism in the First Two Centuries of Islam

"Islamic culture has always been primarily urban" (Grabar, 1995)

In the first two centuries, Islamic civilization attained high level of cultural productivity. Ostentation, which is almost an expression of power (not related to Islam), was the most remarkable feature of architecture, "whatever it's social or personal function, there hardly exists a major monument of Islamic architecture that does not reflect power in some fashion" (Grabar, 1995). In this regard, it is useful to emphasize that urban features of the city are centre to this paper rather than individual buildings details.

The urban fabric of the traditional city consisted of central mosques that were multi-purpose and accessible to all, markets that encompassed other public services, a net of compressed streets of all shapes and sizes, few squares (maidans), and series of detached houses, which often contain courtyards. The main features of urbanism were as follows

- There were no strict rules for the buildings' construction, however, Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh) endeavoured to deduce Islamic laws and extract the regulations from their sources (Qur'an, the word of Allah, and Sunnah, sayings of Prophet Mohammed), provided systems of decision-making to organize the building process and the urban physical character.
- Tyrant rulers were controlling the building process, their decisions were macro. As a result, the urban form (the three dimensional state of the city) was often an expression of their desires, and didn't conduct a pure message of Islam
- Although ruler's decisions where macro in nature, Islamic laws could affect the road restrictions and legislations,

and the citizens aggregate significant impact on building process to some instant. Islamic affairs of the road rights and the relations with neighbours, Islamic law of 'waqf' which resulted into real-estate perpetuity, the obligations of controlling visual overlooking for the sanctity of the family, and Islamic recommendations of beauty and aesthetic values, are some examples of that impact

- Traditional Islamic city was shaped by some structural elements, including; the domes and minarets that dominated the skyline, the street qualities; such as rhythm, repetitiveness, and walkability, the axial composition with clustered houses, and the use of the square forms and courtyards
- The question of identity and authenticity, in terms of following Islamic theory, became very critical. The structure of the city was immense and astonishing production of coherent cultures, which responded to the rulers' wishes, building requirements and construction capabilities, but relatively engaged with Islamic thoughts
- Islamic teachings urge people to learn, work hard, be productive, be honest, and contribute to the civilization and the restoration of the globe. These teachings collaborated with the spiritual and love interactions to rise great commitments and devotions to build and develop all aspects of life.
- Islamic conquests resulted into a great mixture of civilizations that contributed to the produce of the urban fabric. This patchwork turned the city into a panoramic displays of various cultures, and affected the building process, which made it a dilemma to separate between the genuine Islamic production and the imported one, because of some similarities between cultures, "all cultures were originally and internally coherent, bound together by a spirit and genius"(Grabar, 1995).

Urbanism of the Colonialism Era

The 19th and 20th centuries were an era of accelerated diffusion of Western ideas around the world, with no exception regarding urban design. In this period, many historic Islamic cities came under the control of different

(a) (b)

non-Islamic forces that have different ideologies and diverse policies of building and urban life. Orientalism was developed during this period, and foreign ideologies dominated. As a result, alien building modes and strange urban forms were imposed, which contributed to the loss of identity. Urbanism features of this period were as follows

- Irrespective of the interpretation, colonial urbanization constructed new urban forms as a result of the coincidence between cultural hegemony and political domination. Those forms delivered a segregation system that was both ethnic and social, reflecting the colonial environment.
- The urban fabric was still compact, inherited some distinctive features from the previous period. However, discrete rulers and colonizers kept dominating the decision-making process and adding dramatic changes to the coherent fabric of the city.
- Sometimes, the aspirations of some of the colonized may coincide with the objectives of the colonizer, which made planning techniques and visible symbols of specific cultures easily integrated into the local context. The local context may assimilate Western style urbanism, resulting into endogenous policy of importation of Western born forms and techniques rather than from an exportation of these via colonial dominance.
- Introducing new forms and techniques with multiple identities weakened the cultural influence and cultural appreciation of the colonized and enhanced globalization.
- The 'urban ills' associated with colonial urbanization urged the need to adopt new planning techniques, which contributed to the development of town planning. New concepts and notions evolved regarding place and space.

This demonstration of the urbanism process in the history of Islamic cities outlines the difficult and complicated task of extracting the concepts and methods that related purely to Islam, and stresses the need to study and analyze basic Islamic doctrine in relation to town planning, in order to

establish a firm basis for the policies and regulations necessary to build the future Islamic State of Al-Mahdi (a.s)

2. Globalization and culture in the Current Urbanism Practice of Islamic cities

"Places are constantly in tension between what they are, what they ought to become and what the mediations of global capital and power make of them" (Arefi, 1999)

The process of urbanization and the cultural production have developed in a dialectical relationship, as they have influenced, constructed, shaped and reshaped each other. The urban fabric of most Islamic cities has changed drastically due to the influence of colonial urbanism. The diverse and tangled urban forms emerged from the colonized period, the loss of identity and authenticity due to the ideologies of the rulers which were remote from Islamic ideology, the consecutive foreign and dictator governments, and the gradual diverge of Muslims' thoughts from the basic Islamic beliefs, have evolved into a great rejection of the past and glorification of the new standards and techniques, which promoted the proliferation of inauthentic places and the emergence of placelessness.

Moreover, the invention of the car and the wide spread use of it as a way of transportation, had great impact on the urban fabric. New neighbourhoods were built on the borders of old neighbourhoods without planning strategies for integration, which widened the gap between the old and the new. In addition to that, new roads were cut into the old fabric without any considerations to the urban and social values. "In addition to commodification and devaluation of place, the roots of placelessness lie deep in globalization" (Arefi, 1999).

In the last few decades, sensible and knowledgeable architects led a retrospective revolution for cultural and identity appreciation. As a result, new attitudes like urban infill and urban conservation practice were adopted to enhance authenticity and allow flexibility to integrate the old fabric into the modern city development plans. International standards

became less important and local historical identity was enhanced.

However, the contemporary discourse on the authenticity of place "has been largely influenced by modernity and globalization" (Arefi, 1999). Due to this influence on urban conservation process, cultural production has turned into a "source of opportunities and threats" (Ouf, 2001) in urban restructuring. Cultural production, in the meantime, represents basically visible signs and symbols that express a distinct history, provide art display, and attract tourists and public with the spirit of the past "business of cities" (Sibel, 2001), without comprehensive studies for the basic elements and tools required for a successful urban practice that considers the basic principles of Islam rather than architectural symbols of a specific time.

Local or Global

"The call for proper connections between places goes far beyond a test of architectural ability and talent for urban design. The dilemma lies deep in our social norms and collective consciousness" (Arefi, 1999)

The subtle arguments of local verses global are significant to the evolution of our understanding of global systemic change. The critique of the social evolutionism literature has dominated the efforts to locate globalization, because globalization, in general, weakens local ties and enhances homogeneity and sameness, based on the tenets of consumerism and capital mobility. On the other hand, social relations strengthen local ties and identity, and promote the process of place development.

The current problematic of place evolved from using criteria such as applicability and importance in selecting Western models, "the input of experts whose work was closely modeled on foreign examples was often not appropriate for the special context" (Nasr, eds., 2003).

The debate about global urbanization, which is based on the significance of cities and the development process, revolving around the process of framing a relationship between globalization and locality impacts, exportation or

importation of urbanism techniques, the network structure of globalizing cities, the methodological debates about understanding global networks with urban change and with the synchronization movement of people. Continuous urban change draws conceptual framework for local changes and transformation.

The theoretical synthesis of 'transnational urbanism' presented by the urban theorist,

Michael Peter Smith, is considered as "the most balanced theoretical approach to globalization, seeing it as it works, without any vilification or glorification" (*Encyclopedia*). The term 'transnational urbanism' refers to a sophisticated and complicated process involving cultures, policies, institutions, actors, and localities. The primary sites of this 'cultural metaphor' are global cities.

This theory deepens our conceptual complication on globalization. It frames stimulating connections between the field of urban studies and the field of transnational studies, suggests methods for reconstructing urban theory to coincide with socio-spatial dynamics and the changing urban international relations. Smith suggests that we need to look beyond the intention of globalization and post-modernity, to recognize locality and the growth of cultural practices from a different point of view.

The theory of 'transnational urbanism' could bring a rational balance to the problematic of globalization and the loss of identity, but with the unbalanced laws that govern the earth and the dominance of man-made laws and the commanding forces, this balance will be restricted and confined to specific societies.

On the contrary, in the case of 'Islamic globalization' and the State of Al -Mahdi (as), when the Divine law controls the earth and brings out unity, justice, and equal opportunities to all societies, 'transnational urbanism' would achieve its fundamental goal of the balance between those conflicting issues.

Islamic Globalization and associated Teachings of Islam

In order to enrich our ideas about 'Islamic globalization', it is important to specify some Islamic teachings that enhance globalization.

- Islamic message is extensive and global, it was forwarded to all nations on the globe, not only one nation. It was conducted for building and spreading civilization on the earth. It is a broad message that covers the matters of ideology, culture, health, education, social life, and every aspect of our life.
- Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w) is the Messenger of Allah (s.w.t) for all people in the globe. Quraan declared that Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w) was appointed as a messenger of goodness, truth and grace for all people living on the earth "And we sent thee not (*O' Our Apostle Muhammad*) but a mercyunto all the worlds" (Holy Quraan 21:107)
- Humanitarian Equality is another feature of Islamic teachings. Islam considers all people on earth equal in their humanitarian rights, without any differentiations between them. The only distinction would be with more fear of Allah (s.w.t) "Verily the most honoured of you with God is the one of you who guardeth (himself) the most against evil" (Holy Quraan 49:13).
- Islam considers all Muslims as brothers, despite their origins, languages, and cultures. Love, loyalty, and responsibility are the key elements of the countenance of this brotherhood, and this bond of unity and cooperation attaches Muslims to each other, any where on earth.
- Islamic doctrine encompasses many collective aspects that encourage social bonds. While respecting the rights of individuals, Islam expresses plenty of regulations for the right of groups. Islam encourages collectivity in all kinds of worshipping, eating, and various aspects of social life.

3. Towards a New Approach

The developments in political, economic, cultural and social spheres restructure urban spaces. These changes could affect

the fabrication of urban space and lead to more invention of concepts. Consequently, town planning law and the building law for urban areas will develop and change. Before suggesting some urbanism guidelines for the future Islamic State of Al-Mahdi (a.s), it is useful to analyze parts of the Islamic theory and their Implications on town planning process, in order to propose a conceptual framework for a pure Islamic practice in urbanism.

Islamic theory and its Implication on urbanism

The term 'Islam' means submission and obedience. It can be defined -descriptively- as "following the orders and prohibitions without objection" (Al-Balagh, 1994). The religion of Islam is composed of three key elements; doctrine, legislation (social laws), and morals. Islamic message is complete, can solve all the problems, and encompass all aspects of life, including urbanism, "Never is there anything without a law concerning it or a known Sunnah" (*Imam Sadiq*/Al-Balagh, 1994). The basic goal of the Islamic message is to guide people towards the perfection and happiness in their lives. Following are some Islamic beliefs that would affect urbanism and the building process

- The belief of the Oneness of Allah in himself, His attributes, His actions, and worship, has a perfecting impact on the human spirit, as the ultimate goal of a Muslim is to attain Allah's pleasure. This spiritual interaction can be reflected on life affairs and translated into an integral system that aims to establish perfect society and perfect urban life
- The aim of creating humanity is to worship Allah (s.w.t), reform the earth, and achieve longevity with good and sustainable use of the available resources. People are urged to mobilize their energies in the domain of good and constructive work, and avoid being dissipated and lost
- In Islam, the basic criteria and guide for various life activities is that they should respect their nature and impact on social life. In other words, they should be clear from crime and evil. Islam strongly challenges injustice, corruption, tyranny,

and despotism. This criteria should be considered in the process of framing planning policies, specially land use proposals

- The incorporation of religious activities with different aspects of life is emphasized in Islamic theory, and could be translated into mixed use developments, and reflected on some facilities -like mosques- in discrete diversity of functions and a lively social life
- The belief in justice, socio-equality, and distribution equity would strongly affect planning strategies and regulations
- There is no coercion in Islam. Freedom of choice is represented in Islamic legislations, in a condition that no damage or harm will occur to anybody as a result of that freedom
- Noxious ethics such as monopoly, bribery, egoism, subversion, and perversion are prohibited in Islam, and should be prevented in town planning process
- Worshipping in Islam is not always individually performed. Islam urges Muslims to perform worshiping together, which would promote collectivity and affect urban life
- Islamic teachings provoke people to demand knowledge, wisdom, and be flexible to change. Islam has provided unchangeable rules for the constant needs of humanity, but with fluctuating needs, the rules are much more changeable as far as they coincide with Islamic key principles. This would enhance flexibility in dealing with urban change
- Duties in Islam are within man's ability. There is never a duty or an obligation that is beyond people's forbearance
- Islamic recommendations of beauty, adornment, and cleanliness would preserve public health for individuals and for the society, and affect the aesthetic components of urbanism
- The belief in the eternal life after death and the resurrection notion can create a spiritual motivation and movements in mankind and the design thinking
- Islamic doctrine stresses the significance and eternity of the soul, which may result in the perpetuity of special

buildings -such as tombs- which affects urban rules and regulations

Urbanism Guidelines for the Islamic State of Al-Mahdi (a.s)

The developments and transformation of the components of urban spaces should be taken into consideration in the process of establishing a package of precepts and urbanism guidelines for the future Islamic State of Al-Mahdi (a.s). Components of such package -in addition to the previous notes include:

- Implementation of town planning law and building law that is based on Islamic doctrine as the main reference, and the main source of legislation rather than specific urban forms that might not be completely related to Islam. The key element for this derivation is the originality of those sources.
- Synthesizing with other ideas, practices, professions and with communities, which may lead to further innovation
- Adoption of transnaitional and trans-cultural planning process, that takes place between nations, and provide a framework for spatial analysis that extend beyond them, and construct strong relations and unity between them, while acknowledging their different requirements.
- Implementation of the socially progressive planning policies that enhance the fixed identity (distinctive character and heritage), reflect it on the urban environment, and diminish the negative impacts of flexible identities (imported forms and models) to create a compatible urban fabric
- Strong institutions that enhance education, training, research and development, to promote productivity
- Strategic policy developments and management to ensure adequate resources for sustainable development and lead to economic stability
- Diversity and freedom of choice for people, considering the great variety of locals (elite or weak members)
- Strong accessibility and connectivity with different networks, which achieve linkages between different cities and

societies, so that people enjoy the freedom and brotherhood atmosphere of the Islamic State.

Conclusion

Globalization, associated with complexity, social, and spatial fragmentation, has had major implications for the nexus between social relations and space. Thus, the question remains as how invading global cities could be channelled and how cultural production, as the only way to create or restore genuine and authentic places, could be the cure to the current problematic of place.

Islamic globalization in the future Islamic State of Al-Mahdi (as), would achieve a balance between positive aspects of globalization, on one hand, and cultural and authentic characteristics of place, on the other hand. Islam is a timeless and livable religion; it doesn't belong to a specific place or specific time. In the process of producing town planning laws that are based on Islam, Islamic doctrine and legislations should be questioned and analyzed, in order to deduce the right rules from their origins. Monuments from the past maybe questioned and analyzed to add to the experience, but not to be considered as the main references.

Islam provides Divine judgment for every occurrence, understands human's physical requirements, and establishes rules and regulations that are based on values sufficient for him. With the respectful vision to the city's own criteria, establishing stabilization between collectivity and particularism, accommodation with various and innovative urban concepts, flexibility in dealing with the continuous changes in the urban environment, and in the shade of the Divine and prudent rules, Islamic globalization is capable of providing a superior and extraordinary experience to urbanism.

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The Doctrine of Mahdiism & Politics

Syeda Samina Naqvi

Abstract

" Doctrine of Mahdiism" is based on the solid principle of divine vow that divine vow which says that end of humanity will be in the best form, and for the fulfillment of this promise formation of a perfect system along with an excellent leader is much necessary. A Leader who will get free from the shackles of tyranny the feeble, the pathetic and the oppressed people, Who will give them the courage to live conceitedly, Who will liberate them from the all types of prejudices like religious, racial, linguistic, economical, theoretical etc. So we can say that "doctrine of Mahdiism" is the doctrine to epilogue the "politics" of oppression, tyranny, injustice, cheating, artifice, exploitation, and self interest and to establish a fair and just global Government. We can use the term "Mahdavi State" for the state established on the true, fair and just politics introduced by the divine religion (Islam). So according to the "Doctrine of Mahdiism" we believe on the formation or establishment of a Government and State;

1. with the formation of which Almighty Allah will predominant His religion on all religions of the world and people will penetrate in that true religion in large number,
2. whose laws and political philosophy will be according to the golden teachings of Islam and Quran the teachings which are exactly according the nature of human beings,
3. Where plenty of justice will be available to every one with out any difference or discrimination.
4. Where so called western concept "equality before law" will enforce in true and practicable form.
5. Where the concept Might is Right will not provide the basis for International Law but it will work on the basis of good temperament, equality, justice and brotherhood.
6. Where mere empty claims of human rights will not rule but each and every one will live according to their fundamental rights.
7. Where eternal and durable peace will be maintain.

"Doctrine of Mahdiism" is the doctrine to have firm belief on the establishment of fair, just, equitable and peaceful political system being in vogue by the reformer of the World as known by different names in different Religions. We know Him as "Mahdi Mau'ood" the son of Holy Prophet and will establish true political system according to the Islam. Under this doctrine of Mahdiism we believe on the presence of "alive and vanished" Imam who is living among us, supervising our fair activities, helping and guiding us in difficulties or crisis. Now we are waiting for a Day when He will appear and while terminating the political system based on tyranny, oppression, exploitation, injustice, self interest, cheating and artifice will establish a "fair and just political system". The system which God Almighty wanted to get enforce through His Prophets, that Political system for which every Imam In His epoch tried to execute, It is the best political system which works for the welfare, guidance, Reformation, Plenty of justice, Providing human rights to each and every one with out any discrimination.

PREFACE:

" Doctrine of Mahdiism" is based on the solid principle of divine vow that divine vow which says that end of humanity will be in the best form, and for the fulfillment of this promise formation of a perfect system along with an excellent leader is much necessary. A Leader who will get free from the shackles of tyranny the feeble, the pathetic and the oppressed people, Who will give them the courage to live conceitedly, Who will liberate them from the all types of prejudices like religious, racial, linguistic, economical, theoretical etc. So we can say that "doctrine of Mahdiism" is the doctrine to epilogue the "politics" of oppression, tyranny, injustice, cheating, artifice, exploitation, and self interest and to establish a fair and just global Government. We can use the term "Mahdavi State" for the state established on the true, fair and just politics introduced by the divine religion (Islam). So according to the "Doctrine of Mahdiism" we believe on the formation or establishment of a Government and State;

8. with the formation of which Almighty Allah will predominant His religion on all religions of the world and people will penetrate in that true religion in large number,

9. whose laws and political philosophy will be according to the golden teachings of Islam and Quran the teachings which are exactly according the nature of human beings,

10. Where plenty of justice will be available to every one with out any difference or discrimination.

11. Where so called western concept "equality before law" will enforce in true and practicable form.

12. Where the concept Might is Right will not provide the basis for International Law but it will work on the basis of good temperament, equality, justice and brotherhood.

13. Where mere empty claims of human rights will not rule but each and every one will live according to their fundamental rights.

14. Where eternal and durable peace will be maintain.

So the divine vow that this Government will be the Govt. in the leadership of the most pious person of this world, the people, in the old times, which were made weak in this earth. The most important thing which we must remember while discussing this doctrine is this all things which are under discussion are the mere principles on the basis of which doctrine of Mahdiism stands so either Imam(as) is ruling visibly on this earth or not the principles will remain the same. Now it is our greatest responsibility to adopt those principles or strategies and try to get them enforce, it is also a part of this sacred doctrine. Simply we can say that we must not mere wait for any pertinent situation when the reformer of the world will come and work for the betterment of society instead of this we have to level the ground to adopt those political strategies and have to form a fair and just Government. It will drag us near to the "Mahdiism".

"Mahdiism" is not mere a part of Islamic doctrines but it is a symbol of that hope which all humanity in spite of their different believes keep securely in their hearts. "Doctrine of Mahdiism" is actually is the interpretation of that sweat dream in which all humanity according to their different religious affiliations are waiting for a day when all divine religions will get perfect objectives with the all connotations in them and the exhausted or fagged journey in the history will finish consolatory on the destination of peace and prosperity. This perception of expected pleasant future not only limited to the people having belief on supernatural phenomena but we can observe it in the concepts or believes of those people who completely deny the presence of invisible objects in this universe. So the concept of "Saviour" is older than Islam and also not limited to Muslims society. The special thing which Islam did to this concept is while describing standards, basis and logics Islam has given to this idea a perfect shape and have introduced it as a doctrine the "Doctrine of Mahdiism". Now it is not necessary to wait for a "strange saviour" who will come in the future and will work for the welfare of humanity but saviour is already here among us and not only we have to wait for the circumstances which will demand His presence

necessarily so He may start His greatest mission but have to work for His manifestation, adopt His political strategies and to form a just and fair Government.

Doctrine of Mahdiism and References:

"Doctrine of Mahdiism" was present in Muslims from the origin of Islam and has its solid basis in Quran and Sunnah. Not only Islam has authorities about this doctrine but all the religions in world have this concept in their sacred books.

Mahdiism and Holy Quran:

- **Chapter: 21, Verse:105**
- "And verily We have written in the Scripture, after The Reminder: My righteous slaves will inherit the Earth"
- **Chapter:28,Verse:5**
- "And We desired to show favor unto those who were Oppressed in the earth, and to make them examples And to make them the inheritors"
- **Chapter:51, Verse:9**

- "He it is who Who hath sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it conqueror of all religion however much idolaters may be averse."
- **Chapter:24, Verse:55**

"Allah hath promised such of you as believe and do good works that He will surely make them to succeed (the present rulers) in the earth even as He caused those who were before them to succeed (others); and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He hath approved for them, and will give them in exchange safety after their fear. They serve Me. They ascribe nothing as partner unto Me. Those who disbelieve henceforth, they are the miscreants."

So Holy Quran orders us to have firm belief on the day when the eminence and administration of this world will be in the hands of most pious people of this universe and Islam will get prevalence on all religions of the world, these are solid basis for "doctrine of Mahdiism"

Doctrine of Mahdiism and Narrations:

Doctrine of Mahdiism was present in Islam from its origin, So many times Holy Prophet (PBUH) himself talked about Imam Mahdi (as) as the saviour and reformer of the world. According to shi'ah and sunni school of thoughts hundreds of ahadith have been narrated by Him.

Narrations in shi``ah school of thought:

Behar ul Anwar vol:51,page:75

"World will not abolish till the time that a person from my sacred family whose name will be Mahdi will not rule over the world"

Behar ul Anwar Vol:51, page:74

"Divine inspiration to you people about Mahdi (as), who will become manifest in the time when humanity will suffering separation, anxiety, distress and inconvenience; and the earth will be filled with oppression and tyranny, He will fill it with equity and justice, He will inebriate the hearts of His followers with the eagerness of worship and His justice will be accessible for everyone"

Narrations in Sunni school of thought:

Sahi Tirmazi Vol:9 page:74

"World will not end till the time that a person from my sacred family whose name will be same as mine He will rule on Arab"

Sahi aabi dawood Vol:2 page:207

"Mehdi mau'ood will be from my sacred descendants and from the progeny of Fatima (sa)"

Albian page:72

"In the last epoch my adherents will face a lot of obstinacy from the king of the times that will be such affliction that no one have saw such type of calamity, in the result of such disaster this vast land will get scanty for my brethren in faith, earth will be filled with oppression and cruelty. No asylum will be available to believers and in this environment of tyranny

and oppression no one will reach to redress their grievances. Then God Almighty will send one of pious person from my sacred generation so He may fill the earth with justice and equity as it would be filled with injustice and tyranny....."

So in all the times the famous and learned philosophers of Sunni school of thought have believe on the "doctrine of Mahdiism" but with a little difference with shi`ahs. Only Ibn e khuldoon was the philosopher who opposed about the narrations of Mahdi (as) but even could not deny this hadith;

"In all the times it was famous among the Muslims that in the last era a person from the sacred family of Holy Prophet (PBUH) will emerge who will corroborate the religion of Islam and will prorogate equity and justice even all Muslims will follow him"

(Tab`' Beirut page: 311)

Doctrine of Mahdiism and Religions of world:

As it is in the very nature of human being that he wants to live with peace and tranquility, with economic and social justice, wants no discrimination on the basis of religion, sect, language, race etc. and wants to continue its journey towards evolution rather than adversity so from the hundred of years he is looking for "the saviour and reformer of the world", and this concept is not self made but has its basis in the sacred books of these religions, here I will mention some references where this concept has been introduced in the sacred books of different religions of the world:

"Zoroaster" in their book "jama sip namah"

"Hindus and Brahmans (Hindu priest)" in their books "Dawatak and veed"

"Old Testament (Taurah 'Pentateuch')" in the book "Maza Meer Dawood".

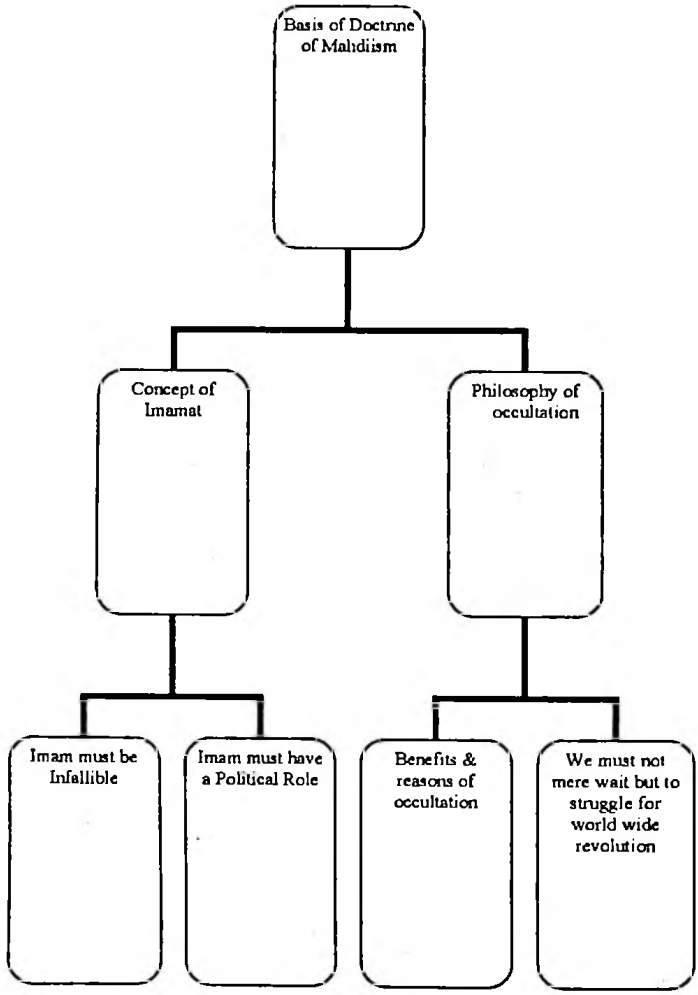
- "New Testament (Bible) in the both "Mi'ti section:24 and Looka section:12"

- "Chinese and Egyptians"
- "European Nations"

So the belief, on the manifestation of a great freedom bestowing personality, a Saviour, a Reformer who will eradicate the politic of oppression and tyranny and will establish a Government of equity and justice, is not only present in the eastern nations and religions but it is a "world wide doctrine" and in attendance in different nations having distinct features. But few characteristics are similar among all religions in respect of this doctrine, these similarities are;

1. Roots of this doctrine are in the nature and disposition of human beings.
2. Even in the preach and provocation of every Prophet this doctrine has a conspicuous status.
3. Each and every one either he belongs to any divine religion or not has belief on the Political role of the saviour or Reformer of the world.
4. People having belief on this doctrine have no concept just to wait for him but to struggle for his appearance either practically or by worships and prayers.

Doctrine of Mahdiism in Shi`ah School of thought:


Basis of Doctrine of Mahdiism
Concept of Imamat
Philosophy of occultation
Imam must be Infallible
Imam must have a Political Role
Benefits & reasons of occultation
We must not mere wait but to struggle for world wide revolution

Doctrine of Mahdiism and politics:

Under this heading we will discuss following topics:

Concept of Politics in Mahdiism
Western political thoughts and Mahdiism
Contemporary Political Practices and Mahdiism

Concept of Politics in Mahdiism:

From the commencement of humanity "Politics" remained an important element in the "divine Religions". So to the first human being (Hazrat Adam as) God Almighty have designated him as "Spiritual Successor (Caliph) or vicegerent. Like this every Prophet have been sending with "Religion (a code of life)" and have been assigned a political role in his society as called "a Leader". Holy Prophet (PBUH) himself before the resurrection used to play political role in society of Makkah as during the brawl to fix "ha'jar e as'vad(black stone of the ka'aba)" He was nominated as mediator to resolve the dispute. During His apostleship Holy Prophet (PBUH) used to receive revelations and deliver the laws and commands of Islam to the people and beside this he was designated as the head of the state and was nominated to administer the affairs of state e.g. established an economic system, gave a liberated judicial system, Provided the basis of International Law as did treaties or covenants and introduced Quran as constitution and equitable civil law in the state of Madina. And while exercising his powers He was given greatest authoritative powers even to interfere in the lives of people; Holy Quran says:

Chapter:33, Verse:6
"The Prophet is Closer to the believers than their selves....."

Chapter:4, Verse:59
"yes who believe! Obey ALLAH, and obey the Messenger and those of you who are in authority; and if ye have a dispute

concerning any matte, refer it to Allah and the Messenger if ye are (in truth) believer in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and more seemly in the end."

After the travelogue of Holy Prophet (PBUH) Series of Prophet hood, Revelation and Legislation of Islamic Jurisprudence stopped but for the subsistence of Islamic Government, enforcement of laws and commands of divine religion, Collective and Political manifesto of Islam a fair and just ruler was necessary who according the traditions of Islam must be "infallible and appointed by God Almighty" as all previous leaders (Prophets) were designated by Him. That's why Holy Prophet (PBUH) on the suitable occasions with the order of Almighty ALLAH not only introduced Hazrat Ali (as) as "Imam (Leader) and Caliph (vicegerent)" of Muslims but also given the "Concept of Imamat" with reference of 12 Imams in His sacred generation. Concept of Imamat is actually a "true and just political system in society."

"Doctrine of Mahdiism" is the doctrine to have firm belief on the establishment of fair, just, equitable and peaceful political system being in vogue by the reformer of the World as known by different names in different Religions. We know Him as "Mahdi Mau'ood" the son of Holy Prophet and will establish true political system according to the Islam. Under this doctrine of Mahdiism we believe on the presence of "alive and vanished" Imam who is living among us, supervising our fair activities, helping and guiding us in difficulties or crisis. Now we are waiting for a Day when He will appear and while terminating the political system based on tyranny, oppression, exploitation, injustice, self interest, cheating and artifice will establish a "fair and just political system". The system which God Almighty wanted to get enforce through His Prophets, that Political system for which every Imam In His epoch tried to execute, It is the best political system which works for the welfare, guidance, Reformation, Plenty of justice, Providing human rights to each and every one with out any discrimination.

Western Political Thoughts and Doctrine of Mahdiism:

Politics as a process and Behavior with Governments:

Modern political thinkers have introduced politics as a process by which decisions are made within groups this term also applied on the behavior with in Governments. So for the above mentioned both qualities the social system must be based on neutrality, justice and equity only then the politics in its true sense can be brought about in the society, the politics which will be able to make fair and just decisions and can show an excellent behavior among Government. In the current world when all the systems remained unsuccessful to show true and fair politics, to establish best political systems for the betterment of humanity, and even remained fail to maintain peace in the world which is basic necessity of every human being only "Mahdiism" fulfills our requirements and introduces true definition of politics, the politics of divine principles the principles which can never get fail and are applicable according to the needs of every times.

Politics a natural institution and a treatise on the science and art of Govt.:

Modern thinkers have said that politics is observed in all human groups interactions and many non human groups while Greek thinkers like Aristotle were not conscious of the distinction between things social and political. On the other hand they defined politics as treatise on science and art of Government. Now we can see the beauty in the "Mahdiism" that while Islam granting an important political role to the Reformer of the world announces that the most important thing for any human being is politics and describes it in the very nature of a man and on the other hand Greek Thinkers in 5th century are telling about the structure, rules and regulations of a state while Islam almost 1400 years before given the "doctrine of Mahdiism" and laid all principles to govern a state in it. So as the Islam considered politics in the nature of man this doctrine does not say just to wait for the time when that

saviour will come and work for reformations but this doctrine urges a man to keep his struggle continue for the formation of a "Mahdavi state" in the light of principles and basis provided to us, it is true Mahdiism.

Politics in Medieval age (state church controversy):

It was the time when controversy of church state relationship emerged, principle of separate spheres of secular and spiritual authority was introduced which paved way for mankind to come under two different authorities church and state. Machiavelli was the famous thinker of this time who freed politics from the influence of religion and ethics. But with the passage of time west it discovered that religion can never be an individual matter. While the "doctrine of Mahdiism" is based on the solid principle that "no separation between religion and politics in possible". Mahdiism has a manifesto, constitution and procedural code given by Islam. It is the religion who provides us real and true guide line on every step of life and a politics without the ethical rules of Islam would be just a dictator ship.

Contemporary political practices and doctrine of Mahdiism:

Unfortunately humanity has been reached on the hazardous point in the whole history. The sole basis for contemporary politics are "might is right", self interest especially economical interests. We can see the countries like America, England, Russia, France, Germany and many others giving literal concepts about democracy, human rights, peace and prosperity, equality and justice but what practically going on?? How the violations of human rights being done by major powers and the whole world is like reticent spectators, How the wealth is centralizing in few countries and all others like poor masses beholding them and can not raise a slogan against it, the countries who assert the standard bearer of democracy violate the boundaries of any country, intervenes in it and cause complete disaster there.....no one knew the

reason, the only logic is presented that "we want a safer world", does any rational mind accepts that about what type of safety, security, freedom and democracy they are talking?? Just for holding some financial resources few minds have made the politics of the whole world kidnapped and some are looking for their interests and some others are working just like slaves. But Unlike Mahdiism is a doctrine to eradicate all the social and political evils of prevailing in the society and to help the oppressed and weak people while forming a just and fair Govt. having best political system for the betterment of humanity without any distinction.

Doctrine of Mahdiism and concept of state or Government:

Under this subject we will discuss following topics:

i. Evolution of the concept of Government or state under western politics and "doctrine of Mahdiism"
ii. Concept of global Government and "Doctrine of Mahdiism".
iii. Concept of Democracy and "Doctrine of Mahdiism"

Evolution of the concept of Government u/western politics and doctrine of Mahdiism:

- Greek political thoughts and Mahdiism:

Plato introduces term of "Ideal state", considers it panacea for crisis and had firm belief on justice in the state; Aristotle reemphasized on a practicable ideal state and also claimed that state originates in the natural instincts of the individual. Islam was aware of the fact thousands of years ago that state or Government are necessary for all human beings so it has given the concept of welfare state and a political role to its representatives, this principle provides solid basis to the "doctrine of Mahdiism". The above mentioned definitions lack practicability while the concept of ideal or welfare state given in Islam is completely practicable as 1400 years ago one state

was founded and now again every person having belief on "Mahdiism" is a waiter of the formation of state based on the just political system. Under the "doctrine of Mahdiism" Islam describes standards, and criteria for the Ruler of the State as foremost characteristic is that he must be "infallible and nominated by God" so he may show care and concern, may prove kind and generous so the state may play a vital role as a panacea for the crisis.

Medieval political thoughts and Mahdiism:

St. Thomas Aquinas described the state as 'God established or natural institution', He claims that man can not live without society and society must have Government. He says the source of political authority is God who is supreme governor and the people under Him are sovereign and may delegate their authority to any form of Government. We can observe a clear contradiction among the thinkers of same time as we know it was the time when church state controversy emerged but a person living in that time through this statement not only admitting the fault in system but introducing the concept of sovereignty and formation of state under him. While "Mahdiism" is not the doctrine emerged with the passage of time or have changed its standards time by time but the rules settled for it are same as given 1400 years before, We believe that not the basis of the doctrine will get change but the circumstances will pave the way to enforce this doctrine on the world wide level.

Modern western political thoughts and Mahdiism:

Thomas Hobbes again introduces an 'ideal state of nature' wherein every person had equal right to every resource, He also gives concept of 'social contract' which is also introduced by other thinkers of modern age like john lock and Jean Roseau. Here we can observe a clear difference in theory and practice even in the so called standards bearer of democratic country(America)distinction have been drawn between dark complexioned and whitish people. While in the "Mahdiism" we

believe on the political system without any discrimination based on the principle that "no one has priority on the others except who are the pious persons" and "every one is equal before law without any "discrimination" the foremost feature of "Mahdavi state" is that there can be no contradiction in practice and theory as it is based on divine vow and "God Almighty fulfills His Promise". Modern thinkers have given the concept of 'social contract' according to which men would enter into a contract and would give up absolute rights for certain protections, while in "Mahdiism" without entering in covenant it is the responsibility of the state to facilitate their public with fundamental rights, securities and all necessities of life.

Concept of Globalization and the Doctrine of Mahdiism:

Under this topic we will discuss following headings;

Concept of Global Government in the Doctrine of Mahdiism.
Evolution of Concept of globalization in the modern society.
Basis on which a global Government can be formed under Mahdiism.

Concept of Global Government in the Doctrine of Mahdiism:

Islam knows no boundaries and introduces the concept of "a welfare and Islamic state" extended all around the world. Islam introduces the doctrine of Mahdiism with the special term of "just global Government". As the doctrine of Mahdiism has world wide recognitions, SO all the human beings expect such role of saviour or reformer of the world whose sphere will be broaden all around the world. Islam demands from "Mahdi as" a role of world wide reformer and provides basis for it;

1. He has a designation similar as granted to Prophets and all the previous masoomeen as" who came as spiritual and political leader not for any restricted area but for the all humanity so "Mahdi as" have to play such a role extended to all the human beings in society.
2. "Mahdiism" gives the concept of equality and justice on every basis e.g. social justice, economical justice, political justice etc And harmony and balance can be established in different areas of the world when they all come under one Government which has a manifesto of the betterment of humanity without any discrimination.
3. Mahdiism is the fulfillment of divine vow which says that in the last times the earth will be filled with justice and equity and an equitable global Government will be formed for the people suffering afflictions, torments, inconvenience and hardships.

Emergence and evolution of the concept of globalization in western society:

History:

1. The oldest form of Govt. was tribal organization, ruled by elders, supplanted by Monarchy, often aided by military conquest led to a system of feudalism.

2. The "first era of globalization" is said to have broken down in stages beginning with the "1st world war", and then collapsing with the crisis of the gold standard in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Countries engaged in that era of globalization including Europeans prospered. Inequality f ell, as goods, capital and labor flowed remarkably free between nations.

3. Globalization in the era since 2nd world war has been driven by trade negotiation rounds, e.g. GATT, WTO, and including bi-lateral or tri-lateral treaties as "Maastricht treaty" and "the North American free trade", these treaties have been signed in pursuit of the goals of reducing tariffs and barriers to trade.

Grounds available for globalization in western as well as eastern world:

In the modern world globalization is source of much debate and controversy about its nature and merits, but following grounds, either negatively or positively been accepted by the mostly people, in regard of concept of globalization;

Globalization on the basis of economical progress.
Globalization for peaceful purposes.
Globalization on the basis of Culture.

Western concept of globalization and Doctrine of Mahdiism:

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Supporters of this concept seeing globalization as an economic saviour for the world's poor and as helping improve quality of life while in this type of globalization oppressing developing countries, destroying local culture and contributing to global warming. This western thought in practice shows "Globalization is an imagined geography; that is, a political tool of ruling neo-liberalists, who are attempting to use certain images and discourses of world politics to justify their political agenda." Unlike, Globalization introduced in the "doctrine of Mahdiism" is for the benefit of mankind, the eternal and everlasting peace and prosperity, the equality and justice without any discrimination, the balance and harmony and these are not mere empty claims but Mahdiism being a complete manifesto introduces best political strategies for achieving the highest goals.

Basis on which a global Government can be establish under doctrine of Mahdiism:

The "mental evolution" of people will lead them to the demand of a fair and just global Government so the eternal peace and prosperity may maintain all around the world and that is possible through "Mahdiism".

Miserable, harassed, oppressed, and distress human being himself will demand for a "saviour" who may keep them safe from the shackles of exploitation of all kind; political, social, economical etc.

Rapid progress of science and technology on one side globalizing the world and on the other side if we will not use this progress in proper way and carefully it will take us toward the path of disaster and destruction, if suitable and compulsory rules and regulations will not put forth á dispersed and distressed situation will create in the world. As we are looking that no system is providing relief to humanity and with the passage of time every system is getting collapse only the "Mahdiism" can provide satisfaction, solace and consolation as it works with divine rules and regulations.

Formation of a equitable global Government by the reformer or saviour of the world is a divine vow and will be fulfilled by

the supernatural authority, it is an important feature of "Mahdiism".

Concept of Democracy and Doctrine of Mahdiism:

In the under discussion topic we will discuss following headings:

Democracy in the western thoughts and practices

Comparative study of Western Democracy and "doctrine of Mahdiism".

Democracy in western thoughts and its practices:

- Classification of States in western politics:

Rule of	Pure form	Corrupt form
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy

Democracy in Western Political Thoughts:

Simply modern politics describes that; Democracy is, literally, "rule by the people". The term democracy is often used in the context of a political state; the principles are also applicable to other areas of governance. Aristotle says democracy is Government by the poor for the poor about a democratic state he claims that "as all born free and equal, all should have equal rights to participate in state irrespective of wealth, virtue and other qualifications.

Democracy and political practices in states:

The word "Democracy" has acquired a highly positive connotation in much of the world over the 2nd half of the 20th Century, to such an extent that even many dictator ships claims to be democratic and often hold illiberal elections to garner democracy, both internally and internationally. Most Contemporary Political ideologies include at least some form of democracy at some levels of democracy.

Types of Democracy:

1. Direct Democracy(Pure democracy)

2. Athenian Democracy(ancient democracy)
3. Representative Democracy

Doctrine of Mahdiism and western Democracy:

1. Islamic state and Mahdiism:

Actually Islam does not give the concept of democracy as given in the western thoughts. Islam introduces democracy with slight difference we can call it limited democracy. Instead of democracy Islam talks about "Islamic Government". There are two main elements of Islamic Govt. 1) Divine 2) Public. According to the former point, Govt. will be entrust to the people and all the governing people will work as the representatives of God and will be answer able before Him. The latter point talks about the human freedom and consultation in important matters, as Holy Quran given the concept about it. So in a "Mahdavi state" under doctrine of Mahdiism there will not any so called concept of democracy but limited democracy will prevail in real sense it will be "Islamic state", in which sovereignty belongs to Almighty Allah, Laws given by Him will be enforced, people running the Govt. will use their powers and authorities as entrust, and whose basis on the solid principles of brotherhood, justice, equality, providence of fundamental rights without any difference.

2. A complete system and Mahdiism:

The political system in "Doctrine of Mahdiism" which was introduced thousand of years ago still existing in true ideology as with the passage of time no new standards and criteria are defined for it while west thinkers of every time gives a different definition of democracy. If democracy get prove the best system in west then they need not to introduce Feudalism, Capitalism, Secularism or utilitarianism.

Doctrine of Mahdiism and International Law:

Under this subject we will discuss following headings:

4. Sources of International Law.
5. Important Concepts of International Law.

6. International Law and Doctrine of Mahdiism.

Sources ofInternational Law:

1. International Customs.
2. International Conventions.
3. General Principles of Law recognized by civilized states.
4. Decisions or determinations of the organs of International institutions or judicial/arbitral Tribunals.

Important concepts of International Law:

Here are some important concepts of International Law playing a vital role in the contemporary politics and even providing a guide line to so many countries to maintain their foreign policy. These concepts are;

- **Intervention** (Dictatorial interference of by a state in the affairs of another state for the purpose of maintaining or altering the actual condition of things)
- **State Succession** (State succession occurs when a state ceases to exist or a new state formed within the territory of an existing state this concept discusses the effect on the international rights an obligations of state or state concerned)
- **Extradition** (Extradition is the delivery of an accused or a convicted to the state on whose territory he is alleged to committed or to have been convicted of a crime)
- **Asylum** (political refugee of another state)
- **Settlement of International disputes** (amicable and coercive means are used to resolve disputes)
- **International Transactions** (In regard of Economic purposes covenants are made and treaties are signed)

International Organizations (especially formed for peace purposes and security of human rights)

International Law and Doctrine of Mahdiism:

1. Same in theory and Practice:

In the given concepts of International law and in the practice of state we can observe real contradiction among them while in the "doctrine of Mahdiism" we believe that all fair and just laws will be enforced in their true sense, regarding International Law.

2. Law provides basis:

In the contemporary politics the concept "might is right" provides sole basis to International Law while according the "Doctrine of Mahdiism" we believe on Mahdavi Govt. it is the Government of law and justice and Islam gives no option to the ruler except to follow the Laws. So International Law will stand on the basis of law and justice and will enforce on the entire world.

3. Evolution of Concepts:

According the doctrine of Mahdiism we don't believe that all the prevailing laws will be abolished, a system beyond the expectations of people will be enforced. But all the concepts will evolve and get change according to the reason, justice and equity in the light of Islam.

Doctrine of Mahdiism and Human Rights:

Initiatives taken by the West for Preservation of Human Rights:

1. Formation of United Nations, execution of the Charter about Human Rights and establishment of Commissions like Human Right Commission, Commission on the Status of Women, Sub- Commission on prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.
2. Conventions of World wide character have been arranged like European Geneva Convention,1949; Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950;American Convention on Human Rights,1969 etc
3. International bill on Human Rights.

Preservation of Human Rights and Doctrine of Mahdiism:

Rib from which Doctrine of Mahdiism has been introduced excessively is Human right. As introduced in every religion of the world the" saviour" for every miserable, afflicted and oppressed person. In every religion of the world solid basis for doctrine of Mahdiism are Preservation and protection of human rights and to work in this regard without any discrimination. The most important thing in security of human rights is to provide best social and political system as we have some examples here and have above mentioned some institutions working for protection of human rights it is actually collapse of political system in different states as they can not guarantee these rights in their states these institutions are established and work. But in "Doctrine of Mahdiism" we believe on a political system based on justice and equity and works with the divine law as these laws have been alighted for betterment of humanity.

Doctrine of Mahdiism and Liberalism:

The modern concept of liberalism introduced by west is actually not talking about the freedom of man but making him slave of his carnal desires. While famous thinker Jean Roseau himself gives the concept of liberty as 'freedom to act according to dictates and instincts', in this way he is introducing a limited liberty. West talks about liberalism but forgets it enforcement in the fundamental rights of freedom of expression, freedom of thinking, and freedom to live ones according to his religion and culture.

It is the doctrine of Mahdiism which gives real concept of liberalism and freedom. We believe that it is only Imam (as) who will come and liberate the man from the shackles of sensual desires because He is not only the Imam (leader) of the lives of people but Imam of souls (a spiritual leader).

Our Social and Political Responsibilities while Awaiting Imam al-Mahdi (as)

Paul White

As a Political Scientist I get asked to speak about 'controversial' topics. Few are as 'controversial' — and as important to the 'Ummah — as the presents topic. I propose to begin by sketching the political context in which this debate occurs. This will lead to a comparison of the two great opposing systems: man's law versus the law of Allah (*swt*). It will then be possible to look at some of the central ideas of 'moderate' Islam. Finally, the ramifications of these ideas will be looked at and an alternative suggested.

I want to commence by posing a question: where is the *'Ummah* going? The forces of *kufr*, led by the United States , have declared War on Islam. As we meet here tonight, the Muslims in Somalia face murderous attack from an invading Ethiopian army at the behest of the United States . Just as in Lebanon and Iraq , this is justified in the name of 'democracy'. As the US folksinger David Rovics puts it: "Bombs falling over Baghdad , And each one cries 'democracy'".

My 'own' Government has enthusiastically joined in many of these massacres. Australian Prime Minister John Howard says Israel as a 'right to defend itself' (that is, exterminate Palestinian and Lebanese Muslims). Australian troops are in Iraq and Afghanistan and full support has been given to the escalating war drive against Muslim Iran.

Australia actively supports the Israelis who murder, torture and humiliate Palestinian Muslim men, women and children daily – once again in the name of their Godless 'democracy. Islam is under attack everywhere not because it is a source of terror, but because true Islam is the framework of genuine justice. Exploiters and evil-doers really do fear authentic Islam. Islam grasps that humanity today is on the brink of a precipice, centrally because humankind is devoid of the vital values which are necessary for its survival. The Holy Qur'an warns

us: '[2.217] and they will not cease fighting with you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can'.

Sayyid Qutb explains the threat that Islam's Divine system represents to Godless capitalism:

It is Islam that stands for a universal and articulated theory of the universe, life, and mankind, and which sets up the idea of the mutual responsibility of society in place of the idea of hostility and struggle. It is Islam that gives to life a spiritual doctrine to link it with the Creator in the heavens, and to govern its direction on earth; and it is Islam that is not content to allow life to be limited to the achievement of purely material aims, even though material and productive activity is one of the Islamic modes of worship.

The *kufr* media subjects Muslims to an unrelenting barrage of hate. In Sydney, where the largest concentration of Muslims in Australia live, this has duped many non-Muslims into fearing that youth of so-called 'Middle Eastern appearance' are 'rapists', if not 'Muslim terrorists'. The events at Cronulla (a beach suburb in Sydney , Australia) – when up to 5,000 racists and anti-Muslim bigots attacked a handful of persons of 'Middle Eastern appearance in December 2005 – were merely the logical continuation of this campaign.

This was not a riot but a consciously orchestrated pogrom – that is, a violent attack by a majority against a minority, aiming to drastically escalate anti-Muslim tensions, while simultaneously terrorising the Muslims.

The anti-Muslim crusade is being fought at all levels, including at the levels of theology and psychological warfare. The cartoons of our Holy Prophet (S) aimed to further demoralise the Muslims, while at the same time further whipping up anti-Muslim hatred.

The recent lengthy diatribe by Cardinal Pell was a carefully calculated rant against Islam. Given Pell's senior status in the Catholic Church globally, moreover, it is probable that his attack was made at the request of Pope Benedict XVI, who has a track record of demonising Islam. That's why Joseph D'Hippolito wrote gleefully in the Jerusalem Post (9 May 2005): 'The era of de-facto appeasement under Pope John Paul II is over. 'The era of subtle, discreet, yet firm

confrontation has begun'. And yet, so many Muslims still do not get it.

Sadly, many of Australian Muslim community 'leaders' are refusing to stand by the truth, however. This is why the anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic offensive is succeeding, even though there is no shortage of Believing Muslims wanting to 'do something'.

The truth of the matter is that our *'Ummah* has a severe shortage of pious leaders in Australia who are prepared to rally us to challenge the oppressors. Instead, many of our leaders sit on committees with the oppressors (the Government's 'Reference Group' and its sub-committees), that plot against Muslims. Such misleaders want Muslims to become like the Christians: to resign ourselves to submit to oppression, by leaving our religion at the *masjid* door.

This is a blatantly secular perspective. The secular Muslim misleaders are determined, that our Divine ethical and moral code should on no account be applied to how we actually live our lives. The consequences of this for the *'Ummah* should be obvious: it would mean submitting to *kufr* across the board. And, in the context of a global War on Islam, it could result in the destruction of the *'Ummah*.

And yet, this so-called 'moderate' perspective has the support of many Muslims. It appears very 'reasonable'. And it appeals to those among us looking to fit-in with the dominant system, to find a little niche in it, by not rocking the boat. This is the outlook known as so-called 'moderate Islam', which buys the central strategy of the enemies of Islam.

A very conscious game is currently being played by the enemies of Islam. They are attempting to divide us even further into so-called 'moderate (or 'Australian') Muslims' and 'extremist' (or pious) Muslims. The next stage of this operation will be to totally marginalise all those Muslims who insist on following their religious obligations and do not bow to man's desires, instead.

Then those marginalised *Mumineen* will be subject to ferocious repression. Meanwhile, the enemies of Islam will point to the 'moderate' and 'Australian' Muslims as 'good Muslims' whom they accept. Then, if all the so-called

'extremist' (or pious) Muslims are successfully crushed or marginalised, even the so-called 'moderate Muslims' could face a frontal assault.

We should never forget what the founding father of the contemporary anti-Islamic Crusade, Samuel P. Huntington, wrote in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*:

Some Westerners ... have argued that the West does not have problems with Islam but only with violent Islamist extremists. Fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate otherwise (p. 209).

And: The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam... (pp. 217-18).

At the heart of this perspective is the con-game of 'democracy'. Many Western-educated and 'modernist' Muslims are staunch advocates for Western liberal democracy, which they tell us is an integral part of Islam. But the word 'democracy' has come to mean all things to all people. It has become so vague that it is virtually meaningless, even in the West.

Western politicians are fond of using this term to describe any policy they favour. For them, it has no agreed terms of reference, no fixed points of definition. Whether something is 'democratic' or not in their eyes depends only on who is doing it — the West's allies or its opponents. A military regime such as Algeria's can be 'democratising', to give just one example, while a popular revolution such as that in Iran can be 'anti-democratic'.

Western academics and idealist political activists are increasingly concluding that democracy might be an ideal that can only be aspired to — and never actually achieved. And yet many Muslims, the main victims of the West's self-serving and 'undemocratic' conduct, seem unable to grasp this reality.

Unfortunately, the West's dominance in every aspect of modern life — political, economic, cultural and intellectual — has convinced many Muslims that the West has the only viable foundation for success. These Muslims try to find equivalents for Western 'democratic' concepts in Islam. After all, Islam is not opposed to the rule of law; Islamic rulers and

governments are supposed to be law-abiding. They are also supposed to promote and protect the rights of their people, not to oppress anyone, and to consider public opinion in decision-making.

What then, some Muslims say, is the difference between Islam and democracy? However, when Muslims talk in terms of 'democracy', even if they do not mean to be pro-Western, the effect is:

- to give the impression of endorsing Western values and Western claims to represent universal values, and

- to lay themselves open to accusations of being undemocratic by Westerners.

Then suddenly, instead of being able to simply accept the parts of 'democracy' that are common to Islamic political thought, and criticise the rest, Muslims find themselves having to explain why they do not accept all of democracy, at which they tend to be extremely apologetic and ineffective.

They are put on the defensive and find themselves talking about democracy instead of Islam. And, infatuated by the West's supposed 'superiority' in all things, they find themselves apologising for the idea of Shari'ah law not to mention the very concepts of the Islamic state or global Muslim community, the *'Ummah*. These are universally denounced by the West as 'backward', if not 'medieval', and the 'moderate' Muslims concede that they are 'outmoded' in the 21st century.

I have been at Muslim forums where this has been asserted from the podium — even though no-one in the room had even mentioned, let alone proposed — that striving for Shari'ah law should be an immediate perspective in Australia . The lecturer was simply determined to lay his so-called 'moderate' credentials on the table. In the process, he denounced central aspects of Islam. By denying Allah (*swt*)'s Divine framework for human society, and importing foreign concepts, the 'moderate' Muslims are then tempted to work alongside non-

Muslims who claim to be 'democratic', on the basis that they have common agendas and principles.

This also dilutes the Muslims' ability to put Islam first in their thoughts and actions. Muslims who work in the Muslim political arena, for instance, too often know little of Islamic teachings and scholarship, and are too deeply immersed in Western political thought. They are frequently quite unaware that the Western political terms they bandy around are inevitably laden with Western meanings, implications and other baggage that obstruct attempts to think clearly in Islamic terms.

I first remind myself that Allah (swt) commands and warns us:

[3:28] Let not the believers take the unbelievers for advisers [*awliya'a*] rather than believers; and whoever does this, he shall have nothing of (the guardianship of) Allah, but you should guard yourself against them, guarding carefully; and Allah makes you cautious of (retribution from) Himself; and to Allah is the eventual coming.

Then again, later, in the same Surah:

[3:118] O you who believe! Do not take for intimate friends from among others than your own people; they will not fail to corrupt you; they love what distresses you; vehement hatred has already appeared from out of their mouths, and what their breasts conceal is greater still; indeed, We have made the communication clear to you, if you will understand.

And the command of Allah (*swt*) is indeed crystal-clear. Yet still we frequently prefer the lure of the kafirs' so-called 'modernity', to the straight path of Allah (*swt*). We are beguiled by the central lie of Western — i.e., man-made — 'modernity', that it is inherently 'superior' to any Eastern civilisation.

This lie has been around for literally hundreds of years. The West has long assumed that its technological and scientific progress — not mention its secularism and democracy— mark it as 'superior' to the poor benighted and backward East. We in the West are brought up to believe that the rest of the world

absolutely must learn how to imitate us in these respects (technological and scientific progress, secularism and democracy).

The East is branded as 'underdeveloped', if not 'backward'. Citizens in the United States and Australia are both convinced that they live in the 'best country in the world'. We are still told that it is the secular West' mission to bring 'modernity' to the backward East. And that to even question this is to supposedly 'rebel ... against the very law of nature itself' (Maryam Jameelah, *Is Western Civilization Universal?*, 1966 edition, 4-5).

It follows from this analysis that

Along with all the long-established religions, Islam, its civilization and its institutions, are condemned and rejected on the pretext that any order based on Divine law revealed fourteen hundred years ago, could not possibly be valid and relevant to modem life (*Ibid*).

In opposition to traditional society, the West has erected the god of 'unrestricted accelerating change' (*Is Western Civilization Universal?*, 1966 edition, 8). Yet, as Shariati argues, Western 'civilisation' is really a systematic process called 'modernisation'. Like Jameelah, he does not oppose technological advances. But he is very concerned about the social and cultural consequences of the West's so-called 'civilising' mission. He questions precisely what it is that the West wants so urgently to 'modernise'. He concludes that the West's goal is 'modernisation' in consumption.

He comments:

And while the non-European is happy with the idea that he has been modernized, the European capitalist and bourgeois laugh at their success in converting him into a consumer of their surplus production.

Shariati believes that what has happened is that the West has succeeded to a very large extent in depriving the individuals in the East of their very personality. They would deprive him of his personality... He must be forced to believe

himself related to a humbler civilization, a humbler social order, and accept that European civilization, Western civilization and the Western race are superior... The poor man does not realise that he is being modernized instead of being civilized...

I stated earlier that Muslims need to be careful when they bandy Western political terms and concepts laden with Western meanings and implications that obstruct attempts to think clearly in Islamic terms. 'Democracy' is perhaps the Western term that most needs to be avoided, if Western — i.e., man-made — ideological baggage is to be successfully excluded from Islamic political thought. The confusion being caused by the importing of 'democracy' into Muslim political discourse, and the damage this trend is doing to Muslim political thought and the Islamic movement, is immense and is likely to prove a great a problem in the future.

For it is Islam — pure and unadulterated Islam, with its system of Divine values — alone that stands for justice and an end to all oppression. By diluting these values in the name of being 'modern', the so-called 'moderate' Muslims undermine their ability to defend themselves from the attacks of the enemies of Allah (*swt*).

This is why the sworn enemies of Islam such as Cardinal Pell focus on such matters. Cardinal Pell writes about the so-called 'totalitarian nature of Islamist ideology, and the brutality and rigidity of Islamist rule'. Yet the Holy Qur'an includes and entire chapter called '*As-Shurah*', or 'Consultation'.

Here and elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an, [3:159] Allah (*swt*) recognises that humans possess strong moral virtues, including the character to accept each others' views and counsel. But He (*swt*) also recognises that weakness is inherent humans — our tendency to give in to our desires. Allah (*swt*) therefore provides us with Divine values:

[2:177] It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah and the last day and the angels and the Book and he prophets, and give away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflicts — these are they who are true (to themselves) and these are they who guard (against evil).

It cannot be stressed often enough, that Islam is under attack everywhere because its system of Divine values is the framework of genuine justice. Exploiters and oppressors oppose Islam because it utterly negates their man-made and therefore unjust systems. Allah (*swt*) commanded us:

[3.104] And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful.

In other words, it is not only a 'good idea' for Muslims to unite to defend ourselves from oppression; it is also a religious obligation for us to do so! This could not be otherwise, given the undisputable fact that the entire universe must submit to the One and Only Creator – Allah (*swt*), who instructed the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S):

[18.110] Say: I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me that your god is one God, therefore whoever hopes to meet his Lord, he should do good deeds, and not associate anyone in the service of his Lord.

The doctrine that there is no other god but Allah (swt) – the doctrine of Tawhid – teaches us that there is no part of our deen that we can ignore. Everything is interconnected. Those who merely pray and fast, while ignoring the oppression of

their fellow-Muslims (and, for that matter, the oppression of any living creature) are shamefully defective Muslims.

Humanity stands at the crossroads. On one side stands a world system that believes in nothing except immediate advantage for the privileged elites, while humanity as a whole faces endless wars, environmental degradation, and the humiliation of dictatorship, poverty and worse.

On the other, the Divine system of Islam offers humanity a clear, broad and deep worldview which offers society legal and economic bases that have proved both practicable and systematic. We Muslims can either join the Western caravan, which calls itself 'democracy', or we can return to Islam and make it fully effective in the field of our own life: spiritual, social and economic. If we make this choice, we can draw strength from our religion and promote its growth.

Allah (*swt*) promises us [3: 120] that if we place our trust in Him, our enemies will be unable to defeat us:

They may wage wars but they cannot cause a dent in our deen. Allah's enemies will suffer even if they are armed to their teeth with the latest weapons and the most advanced technology. When they go against Allah (by fighting those humans who have become the will of Allah on earth) they are doomed (Imam Muhammad al-Asi, 'Introducing the Fourth juz' of the Holy Qur'an', in *Crescent International*, July 2006, 32).

More than ever before, the world stands in need of Islam and its social system – our practical and spiritual system of life. But we must first demonstrate these values in practice.

This is possible even in Australia , by Muslims applying these principles in our own lives, and by striving fearlessly for social justice. An increasingly vibrant Islamic movement is beginning to once more re-emerge globally, struggling to take up this blessed challenge – and not a moment too soon.

It is time for all Muslims to unite together in this struggle for justice, and in the collective striving for the knowledge needed to obtain this.

In some Australian cities, Muslims are beginning to come together, across the divides of *madhab* and ethnic origin, to energise their iman and to systematically engage in a process of mutual learning. They are forming *halaqas* (study circles) which seek to collectively understand the principles and methods of Islam for the creation of a world in harmony with Allah (*swt*), in a country where Muslims comprise a tiny minority.

Prayerful, systematic reflection is the indispensable precondition for effective action to obtain social justice. Muslims in several cities are staying in touch with each other, in an effort to begin to systematically acquire the knowledge that is needed, so that Muslims can begin to once again take charge of our destinies.

This is our social and political responsibility at this point in time, while Awaiting Imam al-Mahdi (as). Imam al-Mahdi (as) will only reappear if the Muslims themselves first initiate a movement for justice. And the indispensable precondition for such a movement is for the Muslims to systematically acquire the knowledge that is needed, if they are to initiate such a movement for justice, *inshaAllah*.

We can be confident that these efforts will bear good and plentiful fruit, *inshaAllah*. Allah (swt) tells us:

[2:143] And thus we have made you a just nation that you may be the bearers of witness to the people...